

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.

Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l, whose third yahrzeit is 4 Tammuz (Friday). Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohan, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her. May Iran's name and memory always be for a blessing in our community.

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

My young grandchildren enjoy stories about fictional figures from science fiction, mythology, television, and stories. Many of these figures did not exist when I was young. I enjoy asking them, "Is so-and-so a good guy or a bad guy?" As my grandsons get older, I can be more subtle. The point is that almost any real person is a mixture of good and evil. So-and-so in real life is almost always partly good and partly bad, depending on the context and the person's recent actions. Really, almost no person is good all the time or bad all the time. We are too complex to fit in one dimension.

Consider Korach and his relatives. Korach was the leader of Kehat, and first cousin of Moshe and Aharon. The responsibility of the Kehat family was to carry the most holy vessels and items from the Aron when B'Nai Yisrael moved – after the Kohanim wrapped them in coverings of blue cloth (techelet). The Kohanim had to cover the vessels ("kevlat"), because any non-Kohen who gazed on the holy vessels would die immediately. The family of Kehat had the most important (and dangerous) role of any non-Kohen – carrying the holy vessels – but they could only perform this duty after the Kohanim had covered them. God tells Moshe to raise up the family of Kehat and give them the most responsible position of the tribe of Levi (other than for the Kohanim).

Korach was not satisfied with being the top Levi – he wanted to be a Kohen and therefore challenged Moshe (and Aharon). A well known Midrash holds that Korach dressed his followers in blue cloth and asked Moshe whether a clothing item made entirely of blue cloth (techelet) required tzitzit (fringes). The source of the blue cloth would have been the coverings for the holy vessels in the Mishkan. Korach's motive was to embarrass and ridicule Moshe.

Rabbi David Fohrman observes that "kevlat," the word for covering the vessels, also means "swallow." A holy vessel for the Mishkan that goes through the process of kevlat is swallowed in its all blue covering. The payback to Korach was that his rebellion ended with kevlat of everyone in his camp – the earth opened up and swallowed (kevlat) all of them. Our tradition is that those who remained near the camp of Korach could hear those swallowed in the ground shouting and asking for help.

Korach was a natural leader, brilliant at arguing, and one of the leaders of the tribe of Levi. His legacy endures in Jewish

history, despite God's punishment for his sin of leading a rebellion. Korach's sons did teshuvah, separated themselves from their father, survived, and became prominent psalmists. The sons of Korach were the authors of eleven psalms, including some of the most famous. For example, psalm 48 is the psalm for Monday, and psalm 49 is the psalm recited in a house of mourning (on days when there would be Tachanun, except in a shiva house).

One of Korach's descendants was Samuel, one of the greatest prophets, a man who traveled throughout the land to help his people. Samuel also coronated the first two kings of Israel – he set aside his position of being leader of the people to honor their desire to have a king instead of a prophet leading the country. (Because of this connection, the Haftorah for Korach comes from the book of Samuel.)

Korach's punishment brings to mind the experience of another prophet – Yonah, who tried to hide from God's command (to threaten the people of Ninevah if they did not repent). As part of Hashem's punishment, God-fearing sailors threw Yonah in the sea, and a large fish swallowed him. Note the parallels. When the Mishkan would move, the Kohanim would cover the holy vessels, Kehat would carry them to the next stopping point, and the Kohanim would uncover them and place them in the Mishkan. When God covered Korach and his followers in a hole in the earth, they remained buried. Yonah's experience was more similar to that of the holy vessels, because after three days, God had the giant fish expel Yonah so he could complete his mission. Korach and his followers did not perform teshuvah, so their burial was permanent. Yonah did not bring any others to sin with him, and he did teshuvah (eventually completing God's task). He therefore earned forgiveness and a lesson that bringing sinners to repent is more important than having every word of his revelation (prophesy) become true.

Korach's rebellion is the final story of the generation of the Exodus. Hashem presented Chapter 19 (Chukat) while Moshe and B'Nai Yisrael were by Har Sinai. The Torah places it thematically after the three crises (Miriam's tzaraat, the Meraglim, and Korach) that took place during the week of 22-29 Sivan of the second year. Because the Meraglim and Korach both led to substantial numbers of deaths, chapter 19 was an appropriate place for the instructions of how to become tahor after contact with a dead body. Chapter 20 immediately follows in the Torah after a gap of 38 years – the story of the final year in the Midbar and the experiences of the generation of the children of those who experienced the Exodus.

As my grandsons become old enough to appreciate that real people are neither all good nor all bad, I change my discussion to discuss good and bad things that various people do. The lesson I want my grandsons to learn is that we may choose how much good we can do and how much bad. Part of following the mitzvot is to choose to do as much good as we can in our time and repent from anything bad that we do. As we prepare for the High Holy Days, we must seek forgiveness from those we have harmed and do our best to do more good and less bad.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Eitel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, 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,

Korach: Of Mice and Men

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5765

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach, and their entire wealth. They and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit; the earth covered them over and they were lost from among the congregation. (Bamidbar 16:32-33),

I only open my mouth to change my feet! (My Uncle Al)

Why is said that the earth opened its “mouth” and then it “swallowed”? Is this some poetic personification or does the earth really have a mouth that swallows?

I still recoil in disgust when recalling a scene I witnessed as a child. A friend of mine showed me his new pet snake. “Neat!” I thought. It was OK but then came feeding time and I lost my appetite. A poor little mouse was dropped into the glass cage. He tried to hide but there was no place to go. The snake snatched him alive! The cruelty continued all the while struggling lump was swallowed whole. Ugh!

Sorry for the crude and unappetizing description. But -- is the Torah any less delicate in describing Korach and his family being swallowed alive and whole into the earth?! They didn’t just fall into a pit. No! It was deliberate and sudden -- like the mouse. We should feel sorry for Korach, perhaps! But the greater purpose in giving color to this ugly episode is to learn “not to be like Korach and his followers.” So why did the earth open its mouth and swallow him alive?

The Chovos HaLevavos in the Section called Cheshbon HaNefesh -- “Personal Accounting,” there are listed not less than thirty matters one might meditate about. Number nine he suggests that one should imagine that a prince is sent by his father the king on a dangerous mission into hostile territory with a huge entourage to care for his every need. The prince should reckon for himself how his servants and attendants would behave if they become aware that the prince himself is not strictly following the rules of the king. If he stays up late and drinks they too will take his queue.

We similarly find ourselves vulnerable and delicately positioned. We are surrounded by attendants, including 60 trillion cells. If one rebels, G-d forbid, the whole system could crash. There are huge hospitals struggling to tame clusters of unpredictable erratic cells. The oceans, the earth, and all things are part of the friendly support system -- that is, as long as the prince behaves accordingly.

Someone once asked Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl., “Why did the earth open its mouth and swallow Korach? What are we to learn?” In typical fashion he gave the most direct and clear answer possible. “Korach had opened his big mouth and so the earth opened its mouth to swallow him alive.” Wow! Korach had everything in life! He was wealthy and wise and enviable in every way. He had it all! When he opened his mouth, though, he dug his own grave. Such is the fragile state of our existence and so go the best laid plans of mice and men.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5765-korach/>

Korach: Truth and Peace

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2023

Korach is not just about rebels; it also portrays different models of leadership. Both Moshe and Aharon are attacked. The latter remains markedly silent during the confrontation while Moshe defends both his position and his brother’s. Aharon’s response comes later and in a different form.

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

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

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

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

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

The Rabbis speak of two aspects of the Divine: the side of Judgment and the side of Compassion. When God interacts with us in the mode of Judgment, every misstep is noted and punished accordingly. But there is also the mode of forgiving, understanding, the mode of Compassion — God looks to find ways to connect, to nurture and give life, rather than focusing on an exact sense of right and wrong.

These modes are paralleled in Moshe's and Aharon's leadership styles. Moshe's was one of judgment, of right and wrong. Aharon's was compassionate, forgiving and understanding. This is illustrated in God's response to the people's outcry. God tells Moshe to take twelve staves and to place them by the ark, one per tribe, including Aharon's for the tribe of Levi. By the next day, Aharon's had blossomed and brought forth almonds. This, the Torah tells us, demonstrated Aharon and his tribe had been chosen.

This is not to say the approach of Aharon can exist alone. The staff must be both a rod and a branch. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (6b) addresses this in its discussion whether a judge should strive for justice (din) or compromise (peshara). It associates the former with Moshe and the latter with Aharon:

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

Truth and peace are not always compatible. The Midrash tells how Aharon would pursue peace: When people were fighting, Aharon would approach each one individually, saying, *"Your friend wants to make up, but is too embarrassed to apologize."* This evoked sympathetic feelings, and the next time they met, the two would embrace and make up. This is

the way of peace, but it is not exactly the way of truth: white lies were necessary to achieve the end.

The world needs judgment and compromise, truth and peace. We may have to choose, but the choice is not necessarily either/or. Peace can be integrated with truth. In halakhic literature this is referred to as peshara krova li'din, a compromise approximating the just resolution. Truth does not exist solely in terms of abstract realities or the letter of the law; it also incorporates equity, fairness, condition of human relationships, and societal well-being. When Aharon said, "*Your friend wants to make up*" he was not lying. He was communicating a deeper, human truth.

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

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/06/truth-and-peace-2/>

Angel for Shabbat: Parashat Korah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Years ago, I was interviewed by a newspaper reporter who entered my office wearing a kippah. After the interview, I asked him about himself. He told me that he had been raised in a secular Jewish home but had become Orthodox during his college years. He took a course on Bible as Literature and that changed his life.

While researching a term paper for that course, he came across an article written by someone who had the same name as his mother's father, a grandfather who had died long ago and who he never met. When he mentioned the "coincidence" to his mother, she told him that the article was in fact written by her father who had been an Orthodox Jew and a Bible scholar. She explained that she had moved away from Orthodoxy in her teens.

He was stunned to learn that his grandfather was a learned Orthodox Jew...so he found other articles written by him and developed a closeness to his memory. Gradually, he was drawn to reconnect with the Orthodoxy of his grandfather.

I remember telling the reporter: "Your deceased grandfather reached out and pulled you back to Torah."

He nodded assent. His long-dead grandfather had brought him back to Torah.

This story highlights the underlying optimism of Judaism. Even if children and grandchildren move far away from tradition, their pious ancestors may draw them back. A moment of reflection may come that reconnects an alienated soul to his/her religious roots.

This week's Torah reading begins with reference to Korah, an arch rebel and trouble maker. Korah fomented an uprising against Moses that ultimately resulted in the deaths of his followers.

And yet, when the Torah recounts the fate of Korah and his followers, it informs us that "*the sons of Korah did not die*" (Bemidbar 26:11). Rabbinic tradition teaches that Korah's sons repented; they realized that their father was guilty of treasonous and divisive behavior and they disassociated themselves from him. Thus, they were spared from the devastation that befell Korah and his associates.

How did the sons of Korah have the strength to avoid following the path of their own father?

Perhaps we can find an answer in the way the Torah identifies Korah in the opening verse of the Parasha. Korah was the “son of Yitshar, son of Kehat, son of Levi.” It is highly unusual for the Torah to provide a person’s genealogy going back three generations.

Maybe this unusual listing of ancestry is pointing to a deeper lesson: ancestors matter! Even if Korah was a flawed and problematic person, Korah’s ancestors were upstanding, pious people. Those ancestors provided a spiritual basis for Korah’s sons to remain loyal to Moses and to the Torah. In a sense, they reached beyond the grave to bring Korah’s sons back.

A well-known Jewish aphorism is “*zekher tsaddik livrakha*” (Proverbs 10:7), the memory of a righteous person is a source of blessing. This is not just figuratively true, but in many cases it is factually true. A righteous life can continue to impact on descendants for generations to come.

* 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 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/node/3135>

Which Direction? Thoughts for Parashat Hukkat

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[note: Because we conclude reading about the generation of the Exodus after the first chapter next Shabbat, I decided to present a preview to demonstrate that the second generation did not learn all the lessons it should have from the fate of their parents. The source of this column is the archives of Rabbi Marc Angel.]

In this week’s Parasha, we read of the Israelites’ complaint of lack of water; of God’s instruction to Moses to speak to the rock; of Moses striking the rock to bring forth water; of God informing Moses that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses had erred; he and Aaron were told by God: “*Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them*” (Bemidbar 20:12).

Upon hearing this news, Moses must have felt devastated. After all the years of devoted service, he was now told that he would not be allowed to finish his mission.

How does the Torah describe Moses’ reaction to God’s decree? Do we read of Moses asking forgiveness? Do we learn that he atoned for his transgression? Do we see Moses crying, beseeching, praying, asking for another chance?

No, none of the above.

Immediately after the verses in which God’s decree is announced, the Torah goes on: “*And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom...*” (20:14). Moses was moving ahead with plans to direct the Israelites into the Promised Land. He was seeking permission from the neighboring rulers to let the Israelites pass through their lands, as they proceeded to the land that God had given to them.

Yes, as his death approached, Moses did plead with the Almighty for the privilege of entering the Promised Land (Devarim 3:23-25). But at the very moment of God’s decree, the Torah does not report any reaction on the part of Moses. Rather, it describes Moses proceeding with his work as though nothing fateful had just happened to him.

Moses placed the needs of the people above his own personal concerns. He must have been heartbroken at hearing God's decree, but he did not let his own feelings and frustrations get in the way of his leadership of the Israelites.

Moses was a singular leader. He kept focused on his responsibilities to his people, even at great personal sacrifice.

Moses set an example of what true leadership entails. He provided guidance on the nature of responsibility.

In a recent talk, Rabbi Avi Weiss described "*mission-directed*" leadership. Such leaders have a grand vision of what needs to be accomplished and they devote their lives to striving toward their goals. Rabbi Weiss contrasted this kind of leader to one who is "*function-directed*." The latter does his/her job, with better or worse results, without any overriding idealism.

These types of leaders are paralleled by the kinds of institutions they lead. Function-directed synagogues provide prayer services, some classes, and other programs that congregants may demand. They operate as function-providing businesses. Their goal is to operate from day to day, and year to year, as they have done in the past.

Mission-directed synagogues are very different. They not only provide the services of function-directed synagogues, but they have long term goals, idealistic plans, religious vision. They plan for the future in creative ways. They seek to attract people by offering a spiritual message.

Some rabbis and lay leaders think that it is enough to maintain the status quo, or to promote their "businesses" with p.r. efforts. Such function-directed leaders and institutions betray the very ideals and idealism upon which religious institutions must be based. They tend to put their own egos before the religious needs of the community. They use the synagogue for self-promotion; they hunger for control and influence.

Other rabbis and lay leaders are mission-directed. They strive to bring the Divine Presence into the midst of their synagogues and their congregants. They serve with utmost idealism and piety, not for self-aggrandizement or personal gain. Such mission-directed leaders and their communities seek to go beyond providing functions; they seek to inspire ideals, to enhance spirituality, to actively work for the betterment of society as a whole.

Moses is remembered in our tradition as "*Moshe Rabbeinu*," Moses our teacher. We look to his example as a mission-directed leader. He devoted his life to bringing his people closer to God, and God closer to his people. Moses faced many challenges and frustrations; but he did not lose his sense of mission. Even when he was faced with a personally devastating decree, his first reaction was: what shall I do next to help my people achieve their goal?

Are our rabbis and synagogues mission-directed, or only function-directed? This is a question we ignore at our own spiritual peril.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/which-direction-thoughts-parashat-hukkat>

Korach -- A Good "Machlokes"

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2015

Parshas Korach describes the great argument or "Machlokes" between Korach and our teacher Moshe. Korach felt slighted by the way that Moshe assigned the honors. Korach wished that he had been chosen to be the Kohein. So he started a rebellion. By the time it is over, Korach is miraculously swallowed into the ground, and there is nothing left of his following.

One leaves the topic of "Korach's Rebellion" feeling that arguments just don't pay. Disagreements do no good, and leave nothing permanent in their wake. The sages of the Talmud taught otherwise.

The sages in Pirkei Avos observe that Korach's argument was indeed fruitless. But, the sages insisted, there is a paradigm for an argument that will last in glory for all of eternity. That paradigm is the argument between the House of Hillel and the House of Shamai.

Hillel and Shamai were two of the greatest sages in the Second Temple Era. They disagreed on a few items themselves, but their students disagreed on even more. These two Academies had very different approaches on a variety of issues, yet their arguments did not result in fist-fights or name-calling. On the contrary, their views are recorded side by side for posterity. What was the secret of their success?

I believe the secret lies in a Mishnah in Yevamos 13b(which states: Adherents of the House of Hillel did not refrain from borrowing pots from adherents of the House of Shamai, even though the rulings of one group might be considered not kosher to the other group. The reason they did not refrain, explains Rashi, is because the two groups respected each other. They would never feed anything to a member of the other group which he considered incorrect to eat.

Eventually, the law was codified like the House of Hillel. But until that time, real disagreements existed in the Jewish world. During that time of disagreement there was still serenity in the Jewish world because the two groups respected the opposing views. They could borrow pots with confidence knowing that they would never be given something that was not acceptable according to their view.

In our time it is difficult to find perfect parallels to the Houses of Hillel and Shamai but there are special moments in which we can relive the greatness of those great Academies.

One of my fondest memories growing up in my parents home in Monsey is when my mother offered to make supper for a neighbor in need. I don't recall if the neighbor was ill, or perhaps during shiva, but my mother went to great lengths to cook the meal properly for this family. You see, this neighbor of ours observed a very strict level of kosher. They observed "Yoshon."

What is "Yoshon" you ask? At the time, I asked the same thing. There is a law in the Land of Israel that new wheat may not be eaten until after the first days of Pesach. Prevalent practice is to assume that this law only applies in the Land of Israel. It is considered one of the agricultural laws of the Holy Land, and its observance in the United States is not required by the major kosher agencies. Nevertheless these neighbors of ours observed "Yoshon," and my mother had every intention to accommodate them.

It wasn't easy to make meatballs and spaghetti for this family. Product codes had to be checked to ensure that the wheat was of a pre-pesach variety. But for all the research, it was a labor of love. When we finally carried the food over to their home, we knew we had done well.

Sometimes we encounter a person who has a view in observance that is stricter than ours. It is entirely possible that our view is also acceptable. But if their view was arrived at as a sincere expression of what they feel G-d wants of them then it should be respected and accommodated to the best of our ability. Views in Torah that are sincere build Torah, they don't threaten. People who respect a more stringent view ensure that their own view will be granted the blessing of eternity.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine. Note: I did not receive a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Rhine this week, so I am running one from his archives.

<http://www.teach613.org/korach-a-good-machlokes/>

Korach – Mourning the Wicked

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

In this week's parsha we learn of the great rebellion of Korach and his followers. Korach led some of the leaders of the generation in the desert to revolt against Moshe. They denied Moshe's position as a true emissary of G-d and challenged Aharon's position as the Kohein Gadol, the High Priest. Moshe offered that they put it to the test. If anyone other than the High Priest brought an unauthorized incense offering, they would be punished with death by G-d. Only the High Priest could bring that offering in the Holy of Holies. Whoever thought that they should have been the High Priest instead of Aharon should come and offer the incense offering, along with Aharon. Whoever survived was clearly the one G-d had chosen, and all who died were clearly mistaken. Unfortunately, despite the grave danger, they agreed to this test, and they all perished and were burnt.

Immediately after they perished, while the fires of the incense offerings were still burning in all of the pans, Hashem commands that Elazar, Aharon's son, should take all of the pans and discard the flames. The pans should then be flattened and made into a cover for the altar. Hashem explains that this is because the pans were brought before Him and were thereby consecrated. They should therefore be used for a holy purpose. This cover would serve a greater purpose, as well. When people would see this cover, it would remind them of all those who perished when they challenged Aharon's priesthood, and would prevent anyone from challenging the priesthood again in the future. (Bamidbar 17:1-5)

The Ohr Hachaim (ibid.) notes that Hashem explained that the pans were consecrated because they themselves were brought before Him, and not because they were used to bring a incense offering before Him. This is because the incense offerings brought in those pans were despised by G-d. For that reason, Elazar was instructed to discard all of the flames which were in the pans. The pans themselves though were created to bring a sacrifice before G-d, and were therefore consecrated.

This is a beautiful illustration of how much G-d values whatever we do right. Although these people were engaged in a bitter rebellion against G-d, and the sacrifice they were bringing was despised by G-d, they still were thinking about G-d. For that reason alone, their pans were cherished by G-d. So valued were the pans of these wicked rebels, that G-d commanded they be used to create a cover for the altar in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle.

The Ohr Hachaim takes this lesson even further. He notes that the Torah continues and spells out how these pans would serve as a reminder. It says that they would be there in order that no man who wasn't a descendant of Aharon would ever again try to come close and bring an incense offering before G-d and there wouldn't be anyone like Korach and his followers. (Bamidbar 17:5) The final phrase, "and there wouldn't be anyone like Korach and his followers" seems superfluous.

The Ohr Hachaim (ibid.) explains that this entire verse was written to address a question one might ask. There are many prohibitions in the Torah which don't have physical reminders. Why is the prohibition against rebellion different? When a prohibition is written, there can be individuals who choose to violate it. It was for these individuals that this reminder was created. This is why the verse is written in the singular, "in order that no *man* who isn't descended from Aharon." The final phrase is then explaining why G-d was concerned for the individual in this instance more than any other prohibition. It is because, G-d doesn't want there to be "anyone else like Korach and his followers" who would have to die as they did. G-d wants the sinner to live and repent.

G-d's love for us and appreciation of our efforts is endless, even for one who would choose to rebel and follow the wicked path of Korach. G-d yearns for any chance for connection with us, and commands us to place a reminder on the altar itself to ensure that even that one wicked individual should live to try again tomorrow.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Note: Rabbi Singer is leaving our community during July to become the head of the Savannah Kollel, associated with Congregation B'Nai Brith Jacob. The Savannah Kollel is one of the treasures of the South, and Rabbi Singer will be a distinguished Chief Rabbi for the Kollel.

Korach

By Rabbi Herzl Heftner *

[Rabbi Heftner did not send a Devar Torah this week. Watch for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Heftner in this spot.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftner is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Reflections on Sefer Bemidbar

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The English name of the Book of Numbers is *במדבר*. The name seems very appropriate to the meticulous descriptions of the multiple censuses of the Israelites, the Levites and the firstborn, followed by the manual of camping, building the Tabernacle, taking apart the Tabernacle, traveling and so on, ad infinitum.

The Hebrew name, on the contrary, seems to reflect nothing of the content of the book and to be nothing more than the first distinctive word in the opening verse of the book after the usual formulaic statement: *“And the Lord spoke to Moshe.”* But as a matter of fact, if we look at the full picture of *במדבר*, we will find that our first impressions were wrong.

As much as the book is concerned about numbers, it does so only until Chapter 11, where the scene and the storyline change abruptly. From a world controlled by numbers, divided into perfectly matching and harmoniously moving units, where boundaries are clear, rules are respected and authority is revered, the Book of *במדבר* takes a precipitous fall into chaos, rebellion and strife.

From chapter 11, we are constantly reminded that the events of the book indeed take place in the wilderness. It is in the latter half of the book where every imaginable manifestation of defiance, anarchy and distrust takes place.

It starts with people being consumed by fire after they raise God's ire by grousing)Numbers 11:1-3(. Next, the riffraff who are tired of manna reminisce about the delicious smorgasbord at the Egyptian slave house)11:4-9(. This ungrateful behavior, in turn, inspires Moshe to denounce his role and responsibilities. He tells God, *“If You deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness”*)11:10-15(, and even when God promises Moshe that He will provide the people with fresh meat, Moshe retorts with a statement showing such disbelief which generations of commentators are struggling with:

“The people in whose midst I am number six hundred thousand men; yet You say ‘I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month.’ Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or could all the fish of the sea gathered for them to suffice them?”)11:21-22(

These stories are followed by a chain-reaction of rebellion and trust crises: The autonomous prophesying of Eldad and Medad)11:26-27(; Aaron and Miriam complaining to Moshe)12:1-14(; the tragedy of the scouts)13:1-14:38(; The unsanctioned and disastrous war against Amalek and Canaan)14:39-45(; Korach's rebellion and its aftershocks of demonstrations against Moshe and Aaron)16:1-17:15(; The people's complaint for lack of water)20:1-5(which caused Moshe to lose his temper and to be told by God: *“Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm my sanctity in sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I had given them”*)20:9-12(; This calamitous chain of events culminates)or nosedives?(with the fateful encounter of the Israelites with the Midianite women, where all boundaries of religious, moral and ethical code are breached.

It seems as if there could not have been a sharper contrast between the “Numbers” and the “Wilderness” personalities of this book. Is it deliberate?

I think that the answer is positive. The lesson we learn from the collapse of the carefully outlaid structure of the Israelite encampment and its hierarchy is that limits and boundaries are extremely important and necessary, but that no government, be it as perfect as possible, can function and thrive without full cooperation of the people or without people respecting the personal space and the rights of others.

The lesson of במדבר is that between the rigidity and inflexibility of rules and boundaries on the one hand and the anarchy of a no-man's-land wilderness on the other, there is a fine equilibrium of respect towards oneself as well as others, which we must maintain in order to achieve a peaceful, harmonious society.

]note: because the Dvar Torah that Rabbi Ovadia sent to me for Korach is what he sent for last year, I decided to run instead his reflections on Sefer Bemidbar, an interpreting perspective that he had not previously shared in this venue.[

* Torah VeAhava. 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>**. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Shavuon Sh'lach

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Levites are a talented tribe. They can sing, play instruments and lift all kinds of heavy Tabernacle construction equipment.

They also seem to be a rarer commodity than priests. In Birmingham, we had about 3 or 4 Kohanim in the congregation but only one Levite. In Auckland, the ratio seems to be similar. Perhaps we can work with NZ immigration and create a Levite visa to import some Levites from overseas to get that coveted 2nd Aliyah.

Our Parsha this week is all about the Levites. Specifically we read about Korach's rebellion against Moses. A Levite against another Levite. Korach's issue was that he didn't want to be a Levite. He wanted to be a Kohen and felt it unfair that Moses didn't give that to him. It was Korach's failure to see the value in being a Levite that led to his downfall.

So, what a blessing we have this week to celebrate a Bar Mitzvah with an entire Levite family. A family that is proud of its heritage. Reuben Levy is a talented young man and a worthy musician. He comes from an honourable family who have been members of our Auckland Jewish community)and receiving the second Aliyah(for years. It has been a pleasure for me to teach you your Bar Mitzvah and watch your growth. We're all so proud of you and wish that you should always continue to be proud of who you are and your unique gifts that you have to give to the world.

Mazel Tov to Reuben and the whole Levy Family!

Shabbat Shalom

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Donkey Stories

by Rabbi Daniel Epstein *

A boy was daydreaming during class one day and started wondering. If I am riding on a beam of light and turn on a flashlight, will it go past me? What an interesting question. Some might scoff and think it was a worthless inquiry, but not this boy. He kept thinking about it and thinking about it and dedicated his life to this question.

This boy's name was Albert Einstein, and this question was whether something can travel faster than the speed of light. This was very important when he developed his theory of relativity years later. The C in E= MC2 is a constant, the speed of light.

I call strange, weird questions like this Einstein questions. Einstein questions are incredibly valuable when you're learning Torah. They sometimes focus more on the theoretical than the practical. Sometimes they are called thought experiments, like Schrödinger's cat or the trolley problem.

I have an Einstein question for this week's parsha. It comes from Benay Lappe, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Svara Yeshiva. What if Donkeys read the Torah? If you think about it, if donkeys read the Torah, they would look at all the donkey stories. They would remember those stories and they would love the donkey stories, because we remember and resonate with stories about us or related to us.

If you read through this week's parsha, Korach, Moshe mentions a donkey in passing. In our Haftarah, Shmuel also mentions a donkey. They both mention them in the context of speeches they are making about leadership. About how they did not enrich themselves personally through their leadership position. They didn't even take a donkey)Num. 16:15, Samuel 12:3(.

I looked through the whole Tanakh for these donkey stories and I was fascinated at the lessons I learned. One lesson is that a donkey represents anavis, being humble. The idea is that the donkey is juxtaposed to the horse. When you are on a horse you are standing much higher, but when you are on a donkey you are lower. It's almost the lowest level but you are still riding on something and not walking.

Avraham rides a donkey, David rides a donkey, and the messiah will ride a donkey. It is very fascinating to think about the role that the donkey plays. We see a lesson that leaders are supposed to be humble. We only learned this lesson from paying attention to the donkey stories. That's the deeper lesson about Einstein questions. They go from the theoretical to the practical and end up being very applicable.

Another deep lesson from the donkey stories is that we need to read the Torah from the view of the donkey or from the view of an archer or from a feminist view, or from the view of the streams or mountains. Through all these different views we are able to get the larger picture of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Jewish Educator and experienced Maggid at the George Washington University Hillel, where he serves more than 5,000 Jewish students. He sends a weekly E-mail Dvar Torah, available at danstorah.com.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/06/donkey-stories/>

Rav Kook Torah

Korach: Who Needs the Priesthood?

"You have taken too much upon yourselves! All the people in the community are holy, and God is with them. Why are you setting yourselves above God's congregation?")Num. 16:3(

Korach's call for religious equality resonates well with modern, egalitarian sensibilities. Why indeed do the Jewish people need a special caste of priests? Why cannot each member of the nation participate in the holy service, personally offering up his own gifts to God? Why do we need kohanim to serve as intermediaries?

Specialized Sectors

To answer this question, Rav Kook employed the paradigm of the human body. Each organ performs a unique function, providing for the health and general welfare of the body. Despite their different qualities and tasks, the organs work together, functioning harmoniously as a unified organism.

Human society is also a living organic body, composed of various sectors and groups. Each sector — farmers, scientists, doctors, and so on — provides a specific service for the collective whole. These communal 'organs' meet society's various needs according to their particular talents and training. As they work together and acknowledge the contribution of other sectors, they ensure the harmonious functioning and flourishing of the community as a whole.

The analogy may be extended further. Just as each individual is blessed with certain strengths and ambitions, so too each nation has specific talents and ideals. These national aspirations may be expressed in the sciences, art, philosophy, economic strength, etc.

Not every limb of a gifted individual is directly involved in his chosen profession. The artist utilizes the hand and eyes, the singer uses the voice, the philosopher uses the mind, and the Olympic runner uses the legs. It is similarly impossible for the entire nation to be directly involved in advancing the nation's ideals. Each nation needs a cadre of spiritual leaders who cultivate the soul of the nation. This spiritual elite allows the other sectors to attend to society's material needs, confident that the unique content that gives the nation its distinctive nature will not be forsaken.

Guarding Israel's Spiritual State

The need for a spiritual leadership is even more pronounced when it comes to the Jewish people, whose national ideology transcends the physical world in which we live. All efforts made to advance the nation's material welfare run the risk of diverting energy from the nation's spiritual aspirations. As a mediaeval Jewish moralist commented, "Whatever builds up the physical detracts from the spiritual."

Due to this concern, practical affairs are attended to in desultory fashion. In the end, both aspects are harmed. The nation's spiritual efforts become disoriented due to its confused material state; and its physical state is weakened due to the coerced admixture of concern for spiritual matters.

Therefore, we need a cadre of lofty tzaddikim, blessed with breadth of knowledge, charged with securing the spiritual state of the nation. This elite is not perturbed if the rest of society cannot fully share in the richness of their spiritual life due to preoccupation with material matters. They know that spirituality will automatically permeate the nation due to the people's natural inclination to holiness. These public servants represent the entire community, and they safeguard its spiritual treasure. The nation in return regards them as its most important assets, and honors them accordingly.

Radical Agents of Godliness

The Kohanim are mistakenly thought of as intermediaries between man and God. In fact, they are not meant to be intermediaries to God, but to enable immediacy to God.

When we approach God, we do not approach Him with our basest drives and inclinations, but with our holiest aspirations and desires. It is our elevated qualities which draw our entire being toward a Godly, enlightened life.

The same is true for the national organism. It is not right or even possible to approach God using society's weakest elements. The nation cannot draw near to God with those who are preoccupied by lives confused by physical sensations and upheavals. This would lead to a feeble level of enlightenment, spiritually impoverishing the nation and the world at large.

Society therefore designated a special sector to enable the entire people to approach God. The lofty, righteous kohanim, steeped in kindness and elevated wisdom, truly know God. The rest of the nation relies on the holiness of their knowledge and emotions. The nation takes pride in the spiritual greatness of the kohanim; it is blessed through their blessing and sanctified through their sanctity. The people are bolstered with strength and inspiration as they work toward their material, social, and political objectives.

The need to appoint a select cadre of spiritual leaders reflects an innate aspect of human nature. Only after a long progression will this institution be truly revealed in all of its nobility — but we are not deterred by lengthy processes. We continue along the path we started so long ago, and we look forward to its completion and perfection.

To designate the entire people as priests, without distinctions, all equally wise and spiritually enlightened — this is not feasible in the world's present state. Currently we need to aspire to a national spirit of holiness, by virtue of the nation's noblest parts. The kohanim will serve as radical agents for sanctity and spirituality, enabling the entire nation to flourish in all endeavours, in its renascence of life in the Land of Israel.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Orot*, pp. 53-55.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORAH_64.htm

Korach: How Not to Argue)Korach 5780(

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

Korach was swallowed up by the ground, but his spirit is still alive and well, and in the unlikeliest of places – British and American universities.

Korach was the embodiment of what the Sages called argument not for the sake of heaven. They contrasted this with the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who argued for the sake of heaven.]1[The difference between them, according to Bartenura, is that argument for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of truth. Argument not for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of victory and power, and they are two very different things.

Korach and his followers came from three different groups. Korach was from the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram came from the tribe of Reuben. And there were 250 leaders from different tribes. Each had a specific grievance.]2[The 250 leaders resented the fact that leadership roles had been taken from them after the sin of the Golden Calf and given instead to the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram felt aggrieved that their tribe – descendants of Jacob's firstborn – had been given no special status. Moses' reply to Korach – *"Now you are trying to get the priesthood too ... Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"* – makes it clear that Korach wanted to be a Kohen, and probably wanted to be Kohen Gadol, High Priest, in place of Aaron.

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

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

As a general rule: if you want to understand resentments, listen to what people accuse others of, and you will then know what they themselves want. So for example, for many centuries various empires accused Jews of wanting to dominate the world. Jews have never wanted to dominate the world. Unlike almost any other long-standing civilisation, they never created or sought to create an empire. But the people who levelled this accusation against Jews belonged to empires which were beginning to crumble. They wanted to dominate the world but knew they could not, so they attributed their desire to Jews (in the psychological process known as splitting-and-projection, the single most important phenomenon in understanding antisemitism.)3[That is when they created antisemitic myths, the classic case being the protocols of the Elders of Zion, invented by writers or propagandists in Czarist Russia during the last stages of its decline.

What the rebels wanted was what they attributed to Moses and Aaron, a form of leadership unknown in the Torah and radically incompatible with the value Moses embodied, namely humility. They wanted to *"set themselves above"* the Lord's assembly and *"lord it over"* the people. They wanted power.

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

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

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

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

There was not the slightest attempt to set out the real issues: a leadership structure that left simmering discontent among the Levites, Reubenites and other tribal chiefs; a generation that had lost all hope of reaching the promised land; and whatever else was troubling the people. There were real problems, but the rebels were not interested in truth. They wanted power.

Their aim, as far as we can judge from the text, was to discredit Moses, damage his credibility, raise doubts among the people as to whether he really was receiving his instructions from God, and so besmirch his character that he would be unable to lead in the future, or at least be forced to capitulate to the rebels' demands. When you are arguing for the sake of power, truth doesn't come into it at all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since both ‘these and those are the words of the living God’, why was the school of Hillel entitled to have the law determined in accordance with their rulings? Because they were kind and modest, they studied both their own rulings and those of the school of Shammai, and they were even so humble as to mention the teachings of the school of Shammai before their own.]4[]emphasis added[

This is a beautiful portrait of the rabbinic ideal: we learn by listening to the views of our opponents, at times even before our own. I believe that what is happening at universities, turning the pursuit of truth into the pursuit of power, demonising and no-platforming those with whom people disagree, is the Korach phenomenon of our time, and very dangerous indeed. An old Latin motto says that to secure justice, *audi alteram partem*, “*Listen to the other side.*” It is through listening to the other side that we walk the path to truth.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Mishnah Avot 5:17.

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

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

]4[Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 13b.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

1. Are the leaders in your country more similar to Hillel, Shammai, and Moses, or Korach?
2. Where can you see arguments in society today that are not “for the sake of heaven”?
3. Why is it so important to listen to the other side even when you are sure you are right?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/how-not-to-argue/>

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.

Houses or Households?

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2023

This week’s parshah recounts the dramatic mutiny against Moses, led by his charismatic cousin, Korach. As great as Moses was, Korach succeeded in attracting hundreds of followers and mounted a serious challenge to Moses’ and Aaron’s authority.

Korach was a powerful, aristocratic member of the tribe of Levi; a man with oversized ambitions. But his challenge proved futile. Moshe was vindicated, and, in an open miracle, Korach and his henchmen went for a deep dive into oblivion:

And the earth beneath them opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses, and all the people who were with Korach and all their property. They and all they possessed, descended alive into the grave; the earth covered them up and they were lost to the assembly. 1

Interestingly, the Torah mentions “*their houses*.” Were there really any houses in the desert? The people were nomads, making and breaking camp regularly. There was no way that they had any real houses of bricks and mortar, or even log cabins. Surely, as wanderers in the wilderness all they could have used for shelter would have been simple tents that they could set up and fold down in their travels. Yet, the Torah uses the word “*houses*.”

According to the Biblical commentator Ibn Ezra,² “*houses*” should not be taken literally at all. It does not mean a ‘*house*’ but ‘*household*,’ i.e., one’s family. In his own words, house is “a broad term for wife, children, and toddlers.”

Might I humbly suggest an alternative understanding: in the arrogant Korach’s eyes, his little tent must have seemed an imposing mansion, a palace of his own delusions of grandeur.

Korach contested the authority of the greatest prophet of all time, the man who G d personally sent to strike Egypt with 10 plagues, split the sea, and bring the Torah to the people. Surely, Moses should have been way beyond dispute, reproach, or even criticism. Yet Korach openly argued against Moshe’s leadership. Only someone with such chutzpah and egotism could possibly have imagined his flimsy tent to be a real, solid house.

House or Home?

What a difference between Korach’s world view and the Torah’s! How do we look at our houses? Do we only see the external — physical residences with roofs and walls — or are we in touch with the inner home, the deeper, spiritual purpose of a house? Are our homes intimate and personal, or are they places of architecture, furniture, and gadgets? Are we fixated with superficial glitz, or do we understand that home is a safe haven, a sanctuary for our family, and a place of love, safety, and security in which to raise the next generation?

Do we have houses or households? Is our house, in fact, a home?

Bringing Home Education

When our children were growing up here in South Africa, my wife regularly gave up buying new wardrobes or enjoying other comforts and conveniences to send them to New York to see the Rebbe, visit their grandparents, and get to know their family. Looking back, I marvel at her virtuous principles and deep insight.

This Shabbat we will commemorate Gimmel Tammuz, the yahrtzeit of our revered Rebbe. In over 40 years of teaching and educating, the Rebbe touched on virtually every subject under the sun. Space, philosophy, politics, medicine, and morals, even sport -- sharing life lessons from soccer and baseball to teach children – no topic was beyond his reach and attention.

But if I had to choose one topic that I think the Rebbe addressed more frequently than any other, I would vote for chinuch, education, and the need to provide all Jewish children, not only our own, with a solid Jewish education.

He went beyond the Jewish community too. His repeated call for educating students of all faiths with a moral, ethical value system was heard loudly and clearly in Washington, and led to the pronouncement of National Education and Sharing Day on his birthday every year.

Please G d, in all our edifices we will focus on our households and families, inspiring our children for generations to come.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 16:32,33
2. 12th century, Spain

* Founding Director of the first Chabad House in South Africa; now Founding Rabbi Emeritus. Also President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5557358/jewish/Houses-or-Households.htm

Korach: Guiding the Perplexed

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Korach, Moses' cousin, stages a rebellion against Moses' authority and Aaron's appointment as high priest. There was a crowd of people whom Korach's had drawn to his side. Moses tried to convince them to abndon Korach's mutiny, but they refused to back down. Moses warned them that G-d would open up a pit in the ground that would swallow them up.)Numbers 16:17-8(

Moses knew that all he had done was in full accordance with G-d's will, and that Korach's arguments were faulty and misguided. Moses could have therefore chosen not to react to Korach, opting instead to let events unfold as they might, confident that in the end Korach would be proven wrong and his plot would fail.

But instead, Moses tried to convince Korach of his error, and when that failed, he devised a test whereby Korach's error could be demonstrated. Moses knew that when people are mistaken, everything possible must be done to correct them.

G-d has promised us that He will eventually bring everyone back to observance of the Torah's commandments, no matter how far they have strayed. Nonetheless, we must, as did Moses, do all that we can to ensure that everyone manifest their relationship with G-d now, rather than rely on G-d's promise and allow them to be estranged from Him)consciously or not(for even one extra moment.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3, p. 304

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

Note: June 22, corresponding to 3 Tammuz, marks the 29th yahrzeit of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, of blessed memory.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

When Truth is Sacrificed to Power

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.

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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. [5775]

[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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“...for the entire congregation are all holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God’s assembly?” [Num. 16:3].

Where did Korach err in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron? On the surface, his argument appears to be both logical and just: “You [Moses and Aaron] have gone too far. The entire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God’s assembly?” Indeed, did not the Torah command the nation, “You shall be holy” (Lev. 19:2)?

According to Korach, if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity. The era of the old guard rule (Moses’ family) must come to an

end; Korach’s family must be given its chance to express its inherent holiness!

Granted, so goes this argument, God revealed Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, and spoke directly only to him; but perhaps, if Korach had been raised in the palace of the pharaohs, and if he had had the opportunity as a free man of princely background to slay the Egyptian taskmasters, undoubtedly God would have spoken to him, as well. After all, we are all holy! It’s just that some have received more special opportunities than others! On the surface, Korach’s words contain a glib truth.

In reality, however, Korach and Moses represent two different philosophies of life. At Mount Sinai, God did not declare everyone to be holy. Rather, He placed into the world the possibility of achieving holiness. “You shall be holy” is a command, not a promise or a declaration of an existing fact. It represents a potential, attainable by means of the commitment to a lifestyle of 613 commandments.

When Korach argues that everyone is holy, that he, too, could have achieved what Moses achieved had he only had the proper opportunity, he is, in fact, uprooting holiness, not defending it. After all, if everyone and everything is holy, then the word “holy” loses its meaning. By arguing for holiness in the way that he does, Korach actually argues against holiness. In his view, we need not strive to achieve holiness. We are already holy!

Perhaps this is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses about the commandments of tzitzit (ritual fringes) and mezuzah. Does a garment which is wholly tekhelet still require a thread of tekhelet in its ritual fringes? Does a house filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah (which holds only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moses replies in the affirmative, Korach laughs at the apparent lack of logic in Moses’ teaching!

But Korach misses the point. Moses teaches that the human being must constantly strive to improve, to become more holy than he was before. Humans must never dare rest on their laurels, because evil is always lying in wait to ensnare, even at the mouth of the grave. Hence, even a house filled with Torah scrolls still requires a mezuzah at the front door, and even a garment that is wholly tekhelet still requires ritual fringes. Never be complacent. There is never sufficient holiness; we must always strive for more!

In contrast, Korach maintains that the status quo is holy – because nothing need change, grow, or develop. This is, in fact, the meaning of Korach’s name: the Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean “bald” – no hair grows on a bald head – or “ice” – no vegetation developed during the Ice Age. “As is his name, so is he.” Korach rejects the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he is

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cynically scornful of one’s ability to grow and develop and change and inspire. This mistaken worldview is the core flaw of Korach’s rebellion.

Moses’ (and God’s) approach is fundamentally different. When Moses announces to the rebels the means by which God will determine who is holy to Him, he orders Korach and his men bring fire in the fire pans and offer incense. Why?

At its best, fire symbolizes the possibility of change. By means of extreme heat, the hardest materials can be made to bend and melt, can be transformed from solid to liquid and to many states in between. Likewise, incense improves its surroundings: the sweet-smelling fragrance can remove the rancid odor of death and decay, and can transform the slaughtered carcasses of the animal sacrifices into an experience of commitment to God that can perfect the world.

Moses’ vision is one of optimistic faith, the rising flames that draw forth the fragrance of the incense and soar heavenward. Material objects, humanity, the very world can be changed, elevated, and sanctified. All that is required is our merit, commitment, and achievement.

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

Two Jews, Three Opinions

We all nod our heads in agreement when we hear the phrase, “Two Jews, three opinions.” We similarly chuckle when we hear the anecdote about the Jew who was discovered after years of living alone on a desert island. His rescuers noticed that he had built two huts aside from the one he lived in. He told the puzzled people who saved him that they were shuls, or synagogues. When asked why he needed two shuls, he retorted, “One is the one in which I pray, and the other is the one into which I would never set foot.”

We have no trouble believing that Jews tend to be contentious and have to express their disagreements with others, even when stranded alone on a desert island. The question that must be asked is whether or not this contentiousness is a good thing.

Long ago, one could find unanimity among wise men about certain values. Everyone consented that wisdom, diligence, and harmony were values worthy of acclaim. Then a great philosopher, Erasmus, came along and wrote a book entitled *In Praise of Folly*. No longer could proponents of wisdom pretend that everyone agreed with them.

More recently, the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell wrote an essay entitled *In Praise of Idleness*. Gone from the list of universally held virtues were diligence and hard work.

What about concepts such as peace and harmony? Have they also suffered the fate of the aforementioned values? Have people begun to believe that contentiousness and argumentativeness, if not outright strife, are to be extolled?

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32), provides the occasion to reflect on just such questions. Korach is the biblical paradigm of the contentious individual. He is, to say the least, dissatisfied with Moses' leadership style and calls into question the entire social hierarchy with which he was confronted. According to the rabbis, he was even skeptical of various rituals, not being able to accept that a house full of holy books required a mezuzah, or that a tallit made entirely of blue colored wool required tzitzit with the blue colored fringe.

He had no difficulty finding contentious companions, and he eventually organized them into a band of rebels and fomented a full-fledged revolt against the authority of Moses and Aaron.

For the rabbis of the Talmud, Korach epitomizes the negative trait of machloket, strife and discord. A famous passage in Ethics of the Fathers distinguishes between legitimate disputes, those which are "for the sake of heaven," and those which are not so motivated. They add: "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." The former type of dispute has enduring value. The latter does not.

From this passage it is apparent that our sages do not categorically oppose dispute, debate, and argument. Rather, everything depends upon the motive. If the motive is a noble one, "for the sake of heaven," then debate is not only tolerated but it is considered valuable. If the motive is ignoble, and certainly if it is merely contentious, it is strongly condemned.

An example of such a harsh condemnation is to be found in the Midrash on this week's Torah portion. The Midrash points out how each of the letters comprising the word machloket represents a different vile trait. Thus, the first letter, mem, stands for makkah, wound. The letter chet stands for charon, wrath. The letter lamed begins the word lakui, smitten. The letter kuf represents klala, curse. The final letter tav stands for tachlit, which is often translated as goal or objective, but in this context means a final tragic ending.

But just as much as improperly motivated disputes were condemned by our sages, so did they find value in disputes which had a constructive purpose. They particularly appreciated disputes which were motivated by the search for truth. Hence, hardly a page in the thousands of pages of the Talmud does not

record strong differences of opinion between the rabbis.

It is noteworthy in this regard that every single chapter of the work known as the Mishnah, which is the core around which the Talmud developed, contains a dispute between the rabbis on one point or another. The only exception to this is the fifth chapter of the tractate Zevachim, "Ayzahu mekomah," which begins with the question, "What is the location for the Temple sacrifices?" No dispute at all is recorded in this unique chapter. Yet this is the chapter chosen for inclusion in the daily prayer book. It has been argued that it is precisely this chapter, which is devoid of even a trace of contentiousness, that merited inclusion in our sacred liturgy.

An objection has been raised to the criterion "for the sake of heaven" as a legitimate motive for dispute. Surely men have been motivated to commit horrible evil because they believed they were acting "for the sake of heaven." One of the strongest arguments raised by freethinkers against religion is the fact that so much blood has been spilled over the millennia by people who were convinced that they were performing God's will.

It is to counter such an objection that the rabbis gave as an example of an appropriate dispute the machloket between Hillel and Shammai. The disagreements between these two sages, and their disciples down through the generations, were characterized by tolerance and friendship. So much so that the Talmud records more than one incident when Hillel came around to Shammai's way of thinking, and when Shammai conceded to Hillel.

The disputes between Hillel and Shammai endure to this very day. Although we generally rule in accordance with the opinion of the former, we carefully attended to the arguments of the latter. I for one am convinced that we do so to perpetuate the attitudes of attentiveness and harmony which both Hillel and Shammai advocated and enacted.

Students of Torah must not only study the content of these ancient disputes. They must also learn to re-create the atmosphere which prevailed among the disputants, an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect and a willingness to concede one's original position in order to achieve the truth.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Rebel and Revolutionary*

The rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron is one which had tragic consequences and which left an indelible impression upon the collective Jewish memory. The Torah lists the names of those involved in the conspiracy in the desert. But who indeed were the members of this conglomeration of the displaced, the

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dissatisfied, and the disaffected? What motivated them, and what was their relation to each other?

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, the Netziv, found three distinct groups in this mutiny of malcontents, and he describes them to us in his commentary HaAmek Davar. The first consists of the two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation. These community leaders were not at all malicious people. They were well-intentioned but misguided. They were great Jews, great even in their piety. That is why the Torah (Numbers 16:2) refers to them as "princes of the congregation, the elect men of the assembly, men of renown." They were Levites who desired to be kohanim not because the priesthood offered them positions of influence and status, but because it represented an opportunity to come closer to God in the course of serving Him in the Sanctuary.

The second group consisted of two brothers from the tribe of Reuben – Dathan and Abiram. These two were known as troublemakers even before the Exodus from Egypt. They were not at all people of ideals or convictions. They were merely power-hungry schemers – nothing more, nothing less.

The third element in this mutiny was Korah himself. He was a man of great fame in Israel and yet was, in a way, the worst of all, for he tried to appear to the people a man of sincerity and genuineness, who had legitimate and selfless complaints, like the two hundred and fifty princes – but in fact he had the same base ends as Dathan and Abiram, namely, the usurpation of the authority of Moses and Aaron.

This analysis – of which we have mentioned but the bare outline – is not only an act of exegesis, but also a valid insight into character that is relevant to the human condition in general, whether in the days of Moses or our very own times.

Permit me to expand on this by referring to a recent essay by Dr. Erich Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," whose ideas we shall accept in part. Fromm distinguishes between two types – the rebel and the revolutionary. The rebel is one who is innocent of any ideological convictions. This individual is resentful of authority and wants to overthrow it so that he can become the authority himself. This person is dissatisfied not with the office, but with the office-holder. His goal is a naked power-grab.

The revolutionary is completely different. This person is not necessarily one who participates in revolutions; the term is used psychologically, not politically. The revolutionary is one who thinks independently. He is unimpressed by those in control and will not accept an idea just because it was pronounced by someone in authority. This individual's mood is a critical one, not that of

bland acceptance. The revolutionary will even be able to see through “common sense” when that term is used to describe what is but nonsense repeated often enough by those who are influential enough. The revolutionary is one who can transcend the parochial limits of his own society and milieu, and thus criticize both his own and any other society. The revolutionary character is one that enables a person to say “No,” and not automatically assent to authority, to the status quo, to their environment, to “conditions.”

Of course, not always is the revolutionary angelic. This person can be right or wrong, good or evil, constructive or destructive, depending upon what he says “no” to, and upon whether his criticism is valid or invalid. Simple “orneriness” is not a virtue. But at least the mood of the revolutionary character is authentic. He thinks and reacts as an individual, not a cipher, not just another sheep in the flock.

With this distinction we can, I believe, better appreciate the Netziv’s analysis of the Korah episode. Dathan and Abiram were what we have called rebels. No ideals or principles or ideologies informed their treachery. They lusted for power directly and without inhibition. The two hundred and fifty princes were revolutionaries. They refused to accept without question the denial to them of the priesthood. But they misplaced their energies. Their criticism was well-intentioned but grievously misdirected. And Korah played an opportunistic, political, demagogic game. He cloaked himself in piety and tried to disguise himself as a revolutionary character, like the two hundred and fifty princes. But in essence he was no different from the rebels Dathan and Abiram. He was the McCarthy of the biblical period.

Indeed, the Korah-type is no stranger to our contemporary world. Far too many greedy, corrupt, and power-hungry men, from Iraq to Ghana and from Indonesia to Latin America, have taken over the reins of government without in the least benefiting their own people – and all this under the pretense of nationalism and anti-imperialism. The slogans are the slogans of revolution, but the goals are the goals of rebellion. Our age, so stormy and tempestuous – born in the French and American revolutions, sired by the industrial revolution, agonizing now in the scientific and nationalistic and civil-rights revolutions – offers great temptations to the Korah-type character. As Fromm puts it, “Twentieth century political life is a cemetery containing the moral graves of people who started our as alleged revolutionaries and who turned out to be nothing more than opportunistic rebels.”

Now these three classes represent what is wrong with the protest against power and authority: the two hundred and fifty princes who were misguided revolutionaries, the avaricious rebels Dathan and Abiram, and the demagogic and deceiving Korah. But the

constructive, creative aspect of the revolutionary character also has a place of honor in the Jewish tradition. In fact, it is a distinguishing feature of Judaism in the world and one of the major functions of Orthodoxy within the Jewish community.

What is the prophetic tradition if not the expression of a revolutionary character? It had its genesis in Abraham – who was an iconoclast. It reached its heights in Moses who defied Pharaoh and both the military might and cultural hegemony of Egypt. Elijah was a revolutionary when he challenged Ahab, Isaiah when he thundered against the drunkards who ruled the northern kingdom of Israel, and Ezekiel when he dissented from the popular worship of Baal and Marduk. For three and a half thousand years Judaism has been out of step with the world – and has thus managed to be its repository of sanity and sanctity.

In like manner, today it is the mission of Orthodoxy to perpetuate this tradition of dissent and the revolutionary character within the Jewish community. Of course, if there are those who believe that this is the best of all possible worlds, that our American-Jewish community leaves nothing to be desired, that synagogue services must be rallies and that rabbis must be propagandists, then there is nothing more to be said. But for those whose love for Jews does not leave them blind, who are painfully aware of some of our faults and defects, there remains the problem of who will fulfill the role of the little boy who dared to proclaim that the emperor was naked. That role, I submit, is incumbent upon Orthodox Jews whose convictions force them to measure mankind and events by the criteria of Torah rather than by their own subjective tastes and shifting contemporary standards. It is we who have the obligation, painful though it be, of being the critics – constructive critics, of course, but critics nonetheless. It is part of the fate, the destiny, and the mission of the Torah Jew to say “no” when others sheepishly nod their heads in agreement, to arouse whilst others drowsie in moral stupor, to irritate and goad when others seek only to pacify and tranquilize.

The founder of Chabad Hasidism, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, in his Likutei Torah, saw this idea implicit in the famous words of the prophet in the second chapter of Jeremiah (verse 2). “Thus says the Lord, I remember for you the affection of your youth, the love of your espousals, lekhtekh aharai bamidbar be’eretz lo zeru’a, how you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” Those last three words, “be’eretz lo zeru’a,” says Rabbi Shneur Zalman, mean not only “a land not sown,” but also a land in which the word and idea and imperative “lo,” “no,” was sown! The most memorable achievement of our people was our willingness to accept a Torah and a tradition that emphasized the “no,” that enshrined the power of dissent, that glorified non-conformism with the popular and the conventional. “Eretz lo zeru’a” – the

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“ground” – principle of Judaism is: “lo,” “no.” There in the desert, the vast and lonely midbar, we learned to be ourselves, to forge our own souls and characters under the tutelage of God alone. There we learned to say No to the idols worshipped by the crowds; No to the ever-present threat of assimilation; No to the passions and lusts that tyrannize a man; No to the avarice which inheres in his character. There, in that “eretz lo zeru’a,” man learned to say No to the hidden fears that creep up on him in secret and threaten to paralyze his will and ruin his peace of mind; No to his grief when it turns excessive and overwhelms him; No to his worries and concerns when they give rise to despair and the kind of hopelessness that moves black clouds over his heart and his mind and his soul; No even to his perverse tendency to say “No” when there is no cause for it!

Today’s American Orthodox Jew must not forget his ancient origins in the “eretz lo zeru’a.” We must say “no” to the bankrupt Jewish secularism that surrounds us, often in clerical garb; “no” to the unreflective, obtuse, and self-disdaining tendency of certain Jewish organizations publicly to violate our most sacred tenets; “no” to Jews who dare call themselves observant or Orthodox but who perpetrate miserable, unethical business practices; “no” to renowned leaders of powerful Jewish organizations who seem to have lost every shred of self-respect. I refer, in this last instance, to the leaders of the American Jewish Committee who had an audience with the Pope in Rome to discuss Jewish-Catholic affairs just two weeks ago – on Shabbat! How horribly incongruous – leading Jews meeting with leaders of another religion on a day that they ought to be spending in the synagogue and in Sabbath rest! Can anyone blame church leaders for silently questioning whether they ought to take Jews seriously at all? Certainly we dissent. We counter pose a most vigorous “no” to this shameful exhibition of self-denigration and inferiority.

There may be those who will complain that this is a negative, unproductive attitude. But that is a shallow conclusion. For, when it issues from a commitment to Torah, every no is really a “yes.” “No” to the idol is “yes” to God. No to assimilation is “yes” to the promise of a Jewish future. “No” to Jewish self-denigration is yes to Jewish dignity and self-respect. “No” to despair and fear and hopelessness is “yes” to faith and trust in God. Our “lo zeru’a” issues from “hesed ne’urayikh” and “ahavat kelulotayikh,” from a relationship of love and affection. Our revolutionary character, unlike the rebellious character, seeks to correct, not abolish; to build, not to destroy. It is motivated by love, not enmity.

It is a difficult challenge which our historic tradition places on us – to be revolutionary without being rebellious, to know when to be critical and when to conform, when to dissent

and when to assent, when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” But God in His goodness has given us a standard by which to judge. It is something Korach and his children learned, albeit too late. For, as the Talmud (Bava Batra 74a) tells us in a most meaningful legend, when centuries later Rabba bar Bar Hannah put his ear to the ground where Korach and his cohorts had been swallowed alive, he heard a voice that issued from the bowels of the earth. And that voice called out, “Moses is true and his Torah is true.”

That is our measure, our criterion. With that truth we shall know when to say “yes” – and when to say “no.”

*[Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Numbers, co-published by OU Press and Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern] *June 14, 1964.*

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Tale of Two Wives

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’Sholom! They would never look at a woman with her hair uncovered. Nevertheless, they were drawn into

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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 pitim!” He did not want the Esrog because he is makpid on a pitim, 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 mechutanim!

There is a well-known incident which took place at the funeral of the Rebbetzin 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 Rebbetzin 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 Rebbetzin’s funeral that you had nothing to ask mechilla 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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel **Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*** **Salt in Judaism**

A Dvar Torah about a condiment? Connected to Jewish values? Although for us, salt is a commodity bought cheaply and found in the aisles of any supermarket, and while excessive consumption of salt today causes health problems, for most of history, salt was looked upon quite differently.

In ancient times, salt was a rare commodity, and it was needed both for the survival of the body and for food. And because it did not

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decay over time (unless it came into contact with water), it was used by many societies instead of money. Roman soldiers were often paid a salary with salt. Therefore, the English word today for payment for service is “salary”, based on the Latin “Salarium” which was received by these soldiers. This is also referred to in the book of Ezra (Ezra 7:22), which notes that Jews were also paid in salt and silver.

The Importance of Salt in the World - In the ancient world, salt was a valuable commodity because it was very much needed and was rare. Salt was crucial for survival for both humans and animals, as it still is today. Today, most people in the Western world consume too much sodium through salt (which is not healthy, but people greatly enjoy the enhanced taste of food with salt), but some sodium is very necessary for the human body to function properly. Salt relaxes and contracts muscles, conducts nerve impulses, and sustains the body’s balance of minerals and water.

Before the invention of refrigeration, salt was the chief method to preserve food and keep it edible for a much longer period. Because microbes that spoil food need moisture to grow, salt acts as a preservative by draining the moisture out of food. Another method of preserving food was called *brining*, i.e., soaking food in this heavily salted water, preserves the flavor and viability of food. Pickling, for example, is a form of brining. Preserving food for longer periods contributed greatly to civilization, as it eliminated the seasonal dependence on food, and allowed for the transportation of food over much greater distances.

Today, we also use salt as seasoning, to enhance its natural flavor. Even in ancient times, in Jewish society, it was accepted and natural to put salt on food at all meals (II Kings 2:20-21). Salt was also a highly valued trade item, which created many “Salt Roads” in the ancient world. The first of the great Roman roads, the *Via Salaria*, or Salt Road, was built for transporting salt. In Britain, the suffix “wich” in the name of a place, signifies that was originally a source of salt, such as Norwich and Sandwich, the prophet Job declares that salt is part of eating (Job 6:6) and that there is no flavor to food without salt.

Let us not forget, however, the harmful permanent powers of salt as well. In addition to destroying the city of Sodom permanently through salt (Genesis 19:24-26), the prophet Zephaniah warns the nation of Ammon that he may destroy it through salt (Zephaniah 2:9). Jeremiah speaks of an inhabitable land as a land strewn with salt (Jeremiah 17:6), and King Avimelech destroys an enemy city by pouring salt on that city, making it uninhabitable (Judges 9:45). Nevertheless, the Talmud states (Berachot 54a) that any meal with salt in it, is considered a “Jewish” meal. Why is this true? What is so “Jewish” about

having salt with our meals? And what is the connection to our Torah Portion?

Salt as a Religious Concept in the Torah - In our Parsha, after the narrative with Korach and his 250 followers, God instructs the Kohanim-Priests the details of their offerings, and commands that to each offering, salt must be added. But the wording is very strange. Salt is called a "Brit Melach Olam," an eternal Covenant with God (Numbers 18:19). Lest we think that this concept and phrase is a one-time reference to salt, earlier in the Torah, it also says that each animal sacrifice must be accompanied by salt which is a "Brit Elokecha-Covenant with God," (Leviticus 2:13). Within that verse, God warns that not only should salt be added to a sacrifice, but it is forbidden to bring a sacrifice without salt. The Talmud (Menachot 19b-20a) discusses this religious requirement, and deems it so necessary and so important, that salt must be added to all forms of sacrifices, whether animal, bird, or baked sacrifices. This is brought down in Jewish law by Maimonides (Maimonides, Book of Mitzvot-Commandment, positive commandment 62, Negative Commandment 99). Placing salt on a sacrifice is a biblical commandment, and the failure to bring a sacrifice with salt also violates a biblical commandment. What is the unexplained covenant between God and the Jews regarding salt, and how and why it is important for us today?

Various Explanations of the Eternal

Covenant of Salt - In our Parsha, on the words "eternal covenant of salt", Rashi explains (Rashi commentary to Numbers 18:19) that the uniqueness of salt is that it lasts forever, and that it also makes other food last longer than they should. So, too, the covenant between the Jewish people and God is that the Jewish people will also last "forever", and never disappear. Hence, salt is called an eternal covenant. Other commentaries give somewhat more mundane reasons. Maimonides (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed III:46) writes that all the nations that worshipped idols, and also brought sacrifices, but in their cultures, they always brought honey with the animal sacrifices and were forbidden to bring salt. Hence, to distinguish between "Jewish" sacrifices and "non-Jewish" sacrifices, God required salt and forbade honey with sacrifices.. However, other commentaries including Bechor Shor and Rashi's grandson Rashbam (Bechor Shor on Leviticus 2:13 and Rashbam commentaries to Numbers 18:19), agree with Rashi that the emphasis in the verse regarding salt is its permanence. as compared with most other objects in the world, and this is the reason why salt was brought with the sacrifices to show that the bond with God achieved through the sacrifices, lasts forever. However, Siftei Kohen goes beyond this simple covenant and parallel with salt. He says (Siftei Kohen commentary on Leviticus 2:13) that salt in Hebrew is מלח MLCH, while bread in Hebrew consists of the same letters בלח LCHM. This demonstrates that just as the

physical world could not exist without salt and bread, in the spiritual world, the Torah is like salt, without which the world could also not survive. So, too, the Torah is an eternal and necessary staple to the spiritual side of mankind, and without it, life could not exist. The Talmud, in fact, clearly states that there is a parallel between salt and the Torah (Soferim 16:8).

However, there is a more mystical approach to salt and the sacrifices, that is outlined in several Midrashim and alluded to by Rashi as an alternative explanation for the salt. This is based on the concept that tears are comprised mostly of water and salt, and that saltwater sometimes represents tears, as Jews dip into salt water at the Seder on Passover (the concept of Judaism and tears will be discussed below). Rashi simply says (Rashi commentary on Leviticus 2:13) that from the first six days of Creation, a promise/covenant represented by salt was made between God and the waters "below" regarding the once-a-year sacrificial ceremony of the drawing of the water in the Temple on the holiday of Sukkot. What is this referring to? Rabbeinu Bechaye (Rabbeinu Bechaye commentary on Leviticus 2:13) elaborates. He says that when God divided the waters above the heavens from the waters below the heavens on the second day of Creation and the beginning of the third day of Creation (Genesis 1:6-10), the waters below began to cry because they realized that they would never now be as holy as the waters in the heavens above. And this cry eventually turned those waters into saltwater in all the oceans that we know today. God responded, and said that these waters are correct, and the heavenly waters will not be permitted to sing God's praises until the lower waters give them "permission". And, further, when the drawing of the water ceremony that takes place on Sukkot occurs in the Temple, there will be a possibility of reuniting the waters below with the waters above. When the world is worthy these two distinct waters will indeed become one body again and become united as one. The salt in each sacrifice reminds the world of this promise by God. It is difficult for non-experts in Jewish mysticism to decipher the specific meaning of the details of this Midrash and the explanation of the salt. But it is an eternal commitment by God to the world to reunite the special forces of the waters at the end of days. This is symbolized by the salt in every sacrifice.

If the Covenant Is Eternal- What About

Today? - As noted above, the concept of salt forms an eternal bond with God and the Jewish people through the sacrifice. But how can this bond be considered eternal if there are no animal sacrifices brought with salt today? After the Temple's destruction and the end of sacrifices, this covenant seems to have "expired." How can it be called "eternal" if there are no more sacrifices and no more salt placed upon them?

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The Rabbis already referred to this in asking why Torah verses describing the Temple first begin with the Altar (which symbolized atonement through the sacrifices) and ending with the Table in the Temple (upon which the twelve loaves of showbread was placed), and in another place, the description of the items in the Temple begin with the Table? The Rabbis answered (Menachot 67a, Berachot 55a) that as long as the Temple stood, the altar indeed served to atone for sins. But after the Temple's destruction, the tables on which Jews eat have the power to atone for sins. This implies that the tables in Jewish homes took the place of the altar, and how Jews behave at these tables has the power to atone or not atone for sins. But the Rabbis took the substitution of our tables for the altar one step further. The requirement to put salt on the sacrifices was also transferred to Jewish tables. Thus, 1200 years after the Temple's destruction, Maimonides rules (Maimonides, Hilchot Berachot 7:3) that observant Jews cannot begin a meal unless there is salt on the table. 300 years later, The Code of Jewish law also rules (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 167:5) that salt is required to begin any Jewish meal. And then, Rabbi Karo continues, and especially states that the table in every Jew's home takes the place of the altar in the Temple, and the food consumed by each Jew at that table is like the sacrifices brought in the Temple. Thus, the eternal covenant with salt continues until today, with the Jewish law requirement of salt at every meal.

In addition to the legal obligation to have salt at a Jewish table and each meal, the message and symbol of salt in the sacrifices can be learned and internalized by every Jew today, as an important value in living a Jewish life each day. The prophet Ezekiel, who lived during and after the Temple's destruction, also emphasized the importance of salt in each sacrifice (Ezekiel 43:24). Why? Before commanding to place in each sacrifice, the Torah forbade adding leaven (which makes bread rise) and honey to be added to any sacrifice (Leviticus 2:11, 13). Why? Rabbi Gifter, Head of the Telz Yeshiva, explains (Pirkei Torah, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Vayikra 6) that since the animal sin sacrifices were substitutes for the person who sinned, (i.e., it should have been the person who was sacrificed and not the animal). Thus, the law of sacrifice can be applied to each human being and his or her behavior and values. The reason honey and leaven are forbidden is that honey is an outside element that causes sweetness to a person from the outside. True sweetness, a person's joy and sweetness must come from within, or it cannot be permanent or real. Like artificial sweeteners, it always leaves a bad aftertaste. Similarly, leaven causes things to rise and temporarily inflates bread, a person's ego, or joy, but like the leaven in bread, it is just air that soon dissipates. Eventually, that soft bread becomes hard and inedible. Only salt is permitted and must be added to a sacrifice, because salt merely enhances the taste of what is already there, what is within

the person, to begin with. Thus, salt should be added, because it brings out the potential that is within, that which a person already possesses. That is the goal of each Jew – to bring out and maximize the qualities that are God-given, and to try to maximize one's natural potential, without adding any artificial enhancing supplements. Affixing illegitimate added, extraneous, and imported substances can never bring a person true joy.

The Unique Jewish Component of Salt – The Unifying of Opposites - We have already seen that the components of salt contain characteristics that seem to contradict themselves. On the one hand, the spreading of salt prevents food from ever-growing forever. On the other hand, putting salt in food adds flavor and tastiness, and extends its sustainability and time it can be consumed safely. This dual component of opposites is a very unique quality in Jewish thought. Unlike most religions, where even today, there is a basic belief that good emanates from a supreme source or force or God, while evil comes from a completely different force or source, both in the physical and spiritual worlds. Traditional Jewish disagrees with this outlook. God is the source of both good and evil, at the same time, two opposite, conflicting forces. The prophet Isaiah emphasizes this concept, as he states that God is the Creator of both day and night, of good and evil and is the Creator of everything (Isaiah 45:7). In the first blessing before the Shema prayer each morning, traditional Jews recite an almost identical prayer (First of two blessings before the Shema morning prayer), God is the Creator of light and darkness, who makes peace and creates everything in the universe. Perhaps this radical concept of a Supreme God creating everything in the universe is a prelude to the “mantra” of Judaism recited just a few paragraphs later: the Shema prayer, where Jews state that God is One. No matter who God appears in different guises and with all the competing forces in the world, God remains One, as the creator of all of it.

Therefore, salt, representing two opposite elements simultaneously, is a demonstration of this quality of God (for God to create physical objects with opposite features is not more “difficult” than creating anything). This concept of opposites is echoed in several of the medieval and later traditional sources. Seer HaChinuch states (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 119) that although salt can both destroy and also keep things vibrant longer, the idea of a sacrifice upon which salt is poured demonstrates the spiritual eternity of and the person who brought it. Nachmanides writes (Nachmanides commentary to Leviticus 2:13) that two opposite forces of nature are needed to create salt in the physical world: fire and water. The salt exists in the water and only through the heat of the sun does it dry and become usable as salt by man. Rabbeinu Bechaye continues this theme of Ramban Nachmanides and says (Rabbeinu Bechaye,

commentary on Leviticus 2:13) that these two opposite elements represent in the cosmic world the concept of mercy in the water and the concept of justice in the fire. Only when these two opposite forces combine can salt be produced in nature, and like the forces of mercy and justice, salt has the power to both destroy and sustain life-food.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik wrote extensively about the constant state of man (Rabbeinu Bechaye, commentary on Leviticus 2:13), especially a religious man, who experiences opposites simultaneously (without mentioning salt). He called it the dialectic, a philosophic term, and gave many examples of man being part of the large natural world, while, at the same time, being a unique and special creature. Similarly, man's desire to be close to his Creator, God, conflicts with his desire to be independent. Many must live with these many conflicts, even if they are never resolved, as with the inherent properties of salt.

Thus, by using salt with meals as a religious concept, the observant Jew declares that he or she is part of this unique “Jewish” bond/covenant with the Almighty, and also tries to enhance to the maximum that with is naturally God-given.

* 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

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

More Human Than We Like to Admit Rabbi Tzuri and Hannah Hason

Although I'm always shocked by the actions of Korach, the event is just one in a fairly hefty list of complaints that Bnei Yisrael had been bringing against Moshe. And HaShem had continued to punish them. There didn't seem to be a happy, uplifting mood in the camp.

Korach recruits Datan and Aviram to join him in the rebellion as they already had a grudge against Moshe from Mitzrayim. They were the two Jews who were fighting when Moshe tried to stop them. They replied that they knew he had killed the Egyptian and would he kill them also? Korach went out of his way to find others who had something against Moshe.

Korach felt that the time was ripe to bring his rebellion. But what was he actually rebelling against? Rashi, taking from Midrash Tanchuma, says that he separated himself to start a rebellion because Moshe appointed Ahron to be the High Priest. Korach thinks that Ahron's placements was his own choice and not HaShem's. How could Moseh and Ahron be more holy than the others? In 16:3, Rashi (Midrash Tanchuma) states that Korach's reasoning was that everyone was equally holy because everyone was at Har Sinai and received the Torah.

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But we learn what really was the last straw for Korach wasn't Ahron's position, but was when Eliziphan was appointed to a higher position than he was. This was a cousin who was from the younger brother than his own father. This appointment just simply wasn't fair. Something had to be done. Korach couldn't live with the disgrace. He was wealthy, wise, capable, how was he not chosen?

We know how the story goes. HaShem demands that Ahron and the rebels each bring a fire pan with incense and HaShem makes his choice clear in front of the whole congregation of Israel. The rebels are swallowed up into the ground and perish. Ahron is clearly HaShem's choice for who is supposed to be the Kohen Gadol.

It's possible that Korach had a strong argument. It's possible that he could have been right. But it's clear that his approach and his actions were not. HaShem makes this very clear. Whether Korach was overtaken with jealousy or truly felt that there was an injustice that was done, he didn't handle the situation in a way that was appropriate for the time and setting. He couldn't see that he still had so much to give by working in the Mishkan and being a Levi. He simply couldn't handle it even though he was in a higher position than most of B'nei Yisrael.

Like Korach, there will always be situations where we think we know best or where we think we didn't receive the position that we were better suited for. Maybe we didn't get the recognition that we deserved. Unfortunately, this is part of life. Unlike Korach's approach, when something like this happens in real life, I urge us all to breathe, relax, and take a step back. We are all already doing so much good for our communities for the Jews that we are teaching, interacting with, inspiring. We can't let jealousy and/or hurt from disappointment overtake us and let that control our actions. We must learn from Korach's failure that despite our personal beliefs and feelings, we still have so much to give and to serve HaShem and the Jewish people. We are blessed to be doing an amazing shelichut and that's possibly exactly where HaShem wants us right now.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter The Wisdom of a Minhang

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, shavuah, nezirus, etc. Regarding all other matters of hafloah, speaking is required. This is established based on the possuk in Parshas Vayikra that speaks about a person

accepting a shavuah "l'vetah b'sfosayim - to pronounce with one's lips." Even if one made up his mind to accept a neder or a shavuah, 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'retz, 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 temei'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 temei'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.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Difference

Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kohas, the son of Levi took along with Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Peles, 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 HASHEM is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above HASHEM's assembly?" (Bamidbar 16:1-3)

It's not so easy to figure out what Korach was thinking. By challenging Moshe, he was challenging the authority of HASHEM. Moshe had not decided on his own that his brother Aaron should be elevated to become the Kohain HaGadol. Even if Korach wanted that for himself, who was his protest aimed at? Moshe! No! He was fighting against HASHEM! Korach must have known that Moshe did not speak on his own or for himself.

Somebody shared an answer with me that since HASHEM tends ear and is responsive to Tzadkim, as it says in Tehillim, "the will of those who fear Him He will do...", then perhaps Aaron was chosen by HASHEM because this was the wish of Moshe. So, he suspected about Moshe the personal motive that he himself possessed. In psychology this is called projection or as the Talmud pithily states, "Kol HaPosel, B'Mumo Posel!" – "Anyone who finds fault in others, it is with his own fault that he finds fault." In the street they say, "When you point a finger at someone else, don't forget that there are three fingers pointing back at you."

What was Korach's problem? At the risk of oversimplifying matters, I think it can be reduced to a simple and yet extraordinarily helpful distinction. The statement seems to

Likutei Divrei Torah

have gained universal acceptance and use. The Rambam writes that we should accept wisdom from whoever says it. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr became most famous for penning the words that crown every Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and the like.

It's called The Serenity Prayer and I have yet to find a problem in or an objection to this statement. It goes like this, "HASHEM grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." It could be that most problems that we have or think we have spawned from not "knowing the difference" between what we can change and what we cannot change. Too often difficulties arise when one finds himself courageously trying to change those things that he should be serenely trying to accept, while at the same time serenely accepting those things he should be courageously trying to change.

Kayin had this same problem, way back in the beginning of human history. His brother Hevel improved on something that he initiated and HASHEM gave Hevel a Divine applause for his efforts. Kayin did not get the same recognition. "He was very angry and his face fell." HASHEM enters as the therapist of all therapists and asks him two questions. "Why are you angry and why are you depressed?" These are two opposite emotions. We are angry when someone usurps our power. That means we feel powerful. We are depressed when we feel powerless. So, is Kayin powerful or powerless? He is powerless over his brother's behavior and HASHEM's reaction. He is only powerful over himself. His feelings are real but they are plugged into the wrong places.

He is angry against his brother and/or HASHEM over whom he has no control and at the same he surrenders to the only one he is responsible for changing, himself. HASHEM gave him a pep talk and told that he has the option to improve and be equally worthy of an ovation, but it didn't work out. As the poets sang, "A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest..." Or as the bad joke goes, "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a lightbulb? One! But the lightbulb has got to want to change!" Kayin chose rather than improving himself or living with the misery of the status quo to bring his brother down! Not knowing the difference between what we can and cannot change makes all the difference.



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subject: Rabbi Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiur

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Korach 5783

1 – Topic – A beautiful thought on the beginning of the Parsha

I just came from the Seudas Preida in Yeshiva Torah Vo'daas where the Zman ended and the young men are going to camp IY"H this coming week even as I head out Boruch Hashem to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Savitzky said a really beautiful Vort and I would like to share it with you.

It says about On Ben Peles that his wife saved him. You all know this. (הַמָּוֹת נִשְׁׁמָה בְּנָתָה בְּנָתָה) as Rashi says she told him why are you getting mixed into this. Now Moshe Rabbeinu is the king and you are the follower. Later Korach will be the king and you will be the follower. So why get mixed into this mess?

He asked a Kasha. That is (חַכְמָה נִשְׁׁמָה, בְּנָתָה בְּנָתָה), that is Chochma, wisdom? It is a Cheshbon, it is a logical reasoning of why get mixed in as you have nothing to gain from it. It is not Chochma, it is a practical Eitz.

He asked another Kasha. Who said Korach wanted to be Melech. Korach didn't say that he wanted to be Melech. He said as is found in 16:3 (-כִּי קָדוֹשִׁים עָזָה). He was a Kofer in Torah, who said that Korach was looking to be Melech. He had an ideology that was contrary to what Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching?

Rav Savitzky answered, it is true that Korach got up and had an ideology that Moshe Rabbeinu is a fake Navi and that Moshe Rabbeinu is not telling the truth. Lo Hashem She'lacho, Hashem didn't send him. The wisdom of the wife of On Ben Peles was that she understood, Korach wasn't really coming because he was a man who had convictions and ideologies that Moshe is a Shakran and his Torah is Sheker. No!

She understood that Korach is a person who wants to rule. Korach is a person who wants everything for himself. Korach is a person looking for power. In order to get power he had to get Moshe Rabbeinu out of the way and he created an ideology to justify what he was doing. (הַמָּוֹת נִשְׁׁמָה, בְּנָתָה בְּנָתָה). She understood this. She understood that Korach was going to be a Melech. That is all that is going to happen from this whole ideology.

It is that way. People especially in western society, when there is something they want, we create Shittos, we create ideas, we create justification for what

we do. Nisht Geshtoigen, Nisht Gefloigen. Even when it is not right, when we have a Yeitzer Hora for something, we create ideology to make it right. This is what we see going on around us all of the time. Values that for centuries, for millennium that human beings have always appreciated are being changed. Why is the ideology not first and the conclusion second? The conclusion is first and then the ideology is made to fit the conclusion. We have to be careful. Sometimes we justify things we do. Be careful. When your justification is first and what you are doing is second and other times when it is the way it should be where you figure out what is right and then you come to a conclusion. A beautiful thought on the beginning of the Parsha.

2 – Topic – Rabbi's Upcoming Trip to Eretz Yisrael

A lot has been said about the differences in

. We are Laining Korach in Chutz L'aretz and in Eretz Yisrael they are Laining Chukas. Does an individual have an obligation to make up the Parsha or not. This is a very basic Machlokes which is discussed in many places. If Krias Hatorah is a Chiyuv on every Yachid or a Chiyuv on the Tzibbur. If it is a Chiyuv on the Tzibbur, whatever Tzibbur you are part of that Shabbos that is your entire Chiyuv. If it is a Chiyuv on the Yachid then the Yachid has an obligation to hear all of the Parshios Hatorah.

This is a Machlokes that goes back and there is a lot written on it. What is the bottom line? Our Posek Acharon is Rav Moshe Feinstein. In Igros Moshe Cheilek Vav, in Orach Chaim Siman Chaf Gimmel (Ed. Note: I couldn't find that this is the Teshuva – any help is appreciated), Rav Moshe Paskens that it is a Chiyuv on the Yachid. Not only that, Rav Moshe says if you are in a Shul and you miss a word of Laining, perhaps you stepped out because you went to the restroom and missed just one word of Laining, you are obligated to go to a different Shul to hear the entire Laining. Rav Moshe goes with the Shittah that Krias Hatorah on Shabbos is a Chiyuv on every Yachid.

Based on that, it is proper, last week I mentioned the problem of where am I going to get Parshas Korach. So my good friend Mordechai (Basch) called and told me that there is a place you can hear it in the Agudah of Avenue L at 2 pm Shabbos afternoon they have a Laining for those going to Eretz Yisrael and I am very thankful for that.

I want to share with you what seems to be a Stirah in the Mishna Brura. What is his Psak? He is a Posek Acharon for Klal Yisrael. Does he hold Chiyuv Yachid or Chiyuv Tzibbur? Let me give you two Mar Mekomos and let's come up with an answer.

The first is in Siman Kuf Mem, S'if Beis. The Shulchan Aruch in S'if Beis brings a Shittah that during Krias Hatorah an individual has a right to turn around and learn as long as there are 10 people listening to Krias Hatorah. (מַהְדָּר אֲפִיה וּגְרָס). There is a Shittah that explains the Gemara this way. The Bi'ur Halacha is Matmia. He says what does it help if 10 people are listening if every individual is Chayuv in Krias Hatorah? Therefore, he is Matmia how there can be such a Shittah. He is Matchik, maybe this means that this man already heard Krias Hatorah and is in Shul now. So if there are only 10 then he would have to listen, if not, then he doesn't have to. But you see that the Mishna Brura holds like Rav Moshe is saying in the Teshuva that it is a Chiyuv on every Yachid. He doesn't understand how can one person be (מַהְדָּר אֲפִיה) turn around and miss. So then it would come out that Rav Moshe and the Mishna Brura are both Paskening it is a Chiyuv on the Yachid.

Problem. In Siman Kuf Lamed Hei, S'if Zayin talks about a case where an entire Tzibbur did not hear Krias Hatorah. It can happen. A person can be in a bungalow colony with one Sefer Torah and they find a Psul and it could be that they didn't hear Krias Hatorah. It could be there is no Baal Korei and they didn't hear Krias Hatorah. What do they do? The following week they have to make up for it and they Lain both Parshios. This is true whether it is a Chiyuv on the Tzibbur or a Chiyuv on the Yachid. If you have a whole Tzibbur that missed so they make it up the following week.

Then it says in Mishna Brura, let's say you are in a Shul with 100 people and all didn't hear Krias Hatorah. They have to make it up the next week. 60 of them on Shabbos walk to another building and heard Krias Hatorah. 40

didn't. There are still 40 people who haven't heard Krias Hatorah. The Mishna Brura says that if Rubim Halchu to a second Beis Hak'neses, Niftaru Kulam, they are all Patur. This Tzibbur heard Krias Hatorah. According to this Mishna Brura if you have 10 Yechidim who didn't hear Krias Hatorah last week and come together in Shul this week, they certainly don't Lain Krias Hatorah as they are 10 Yechidim. As long as the Shul they were in, the Tzibbur heard even if they walked to a different building. If the Tzibbur they were in heard Krias Hatorah then the individuals don't make up for that. Rav Moshe argues and says that if 10 Yechidim get together and they all miss Krias Hatorah last week, of course they hear Krias Hatorah. So it seems to be a contradiction in the Psak. The Mishna Brura is Mitzvah L'yashev.

As for me, Boruch Hashem HKB" H blessed me with very special circumstances and a very special person and I have not missed even during Covid, I didn't miss a single Parsha on Shabbos Boruch Hashem. Certainly I don't want to miss a Krias Hatorah, and Boruch Hashem I didn't have to. I am told for those in Eretz Yisrael, or going to Eretz Yisrael this week that in the Beis Yisrael Shtiblach, at 11 AM they have a Krias Hatorah every week for people who have arrived from America. (I don't have to go because I already heard Parshas Korach). But it is a good Yedi'a to have.

With that, I wish myself a wonderful trip to Eretz Yisrael and I am sure you will all say Amen. I wish you all that you be Zoche to come to Eretz Yisrael and lock yourself in a Beis Medrash and sit and learn Torahs Eretz Yisrael which is different than Torah Chutz L'aretz.

I was once flying on a 1:30 flight that took off at 4:30 very delayed. I dozed off. Rabbi Goldwicht a tremendous Ohev Eretz Yisrael came to wake me up and he told me they are Davening Maariv. I almost missed Maariv. I went to the Minyan and I told him that I have a Shaila. I am going to be in Eretz Yisrael for a few hours. Is it more important that I should go to the Kosel and Daven as how can I go to Eretz Yisrael and not go to the Kosel, but then I won't have time to learn on Erev Shabbos as we are coming in so late and I am going up north to a Simcha. Or is it better that I should go straight to my destination in the north and have the day to learn but then I will have come to Eretz Yisrael without Davening at the Kosel. How can I do that?

He thought about it. Afterwards he said to me, just like Tefillas Eretz Yisrael is different, so too Torah Eretz Yisrael is different. What a Tai'yira expression from a tremendous Ohev Eretz Yisrael. Torah Eretz Yisrael. That is why we go. Use Eretz Yisrael as a place to connect to the Borei Olam, to Shtieig in everything we do. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

<https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/1067941/rabbi-moshe-taragin/thoughts-for-chukat-is-religion-rational-/>

Is Religion Rational?

Moshe Taragin

The legendary King Solomon was gifted with unlimited intelligence. His fabled intellectual talents drew curious tourists from across the globe. Not only did he master the classic fields of learning, but he also studied the secret languages of the natural and animal kingdoms. Nothing lay beyond his penetrating intellect, except for the logic of one solitary divine commandment, which perplexed him. Even with his scintillating intellect, Solomon failed to decode the great mystery of parah adumah, or the red hefer ceremony. Ashes taken from a burnt red cow, mixed with natural spring water, applied twice during a one-week interval, eliminates halachik impurity from someone who had contact with a corpse. Once released from this legal state of impurity, the person can return to the Temple precincts. Understandably, this bizarre service baffled the smartest man to ever live. Not only is the ceremony irrational, but it is also enigmatic and counterintuitive. Though the application of this watery mixture removes impurity from the recipient, it introduces impurity to the officials who administer this sacred suspension. The parah adumah ritual is a riddle wrapped in an enigma, and it bewildered the greatest brain in the history of Mankind. Surrendering to this mystery, Solomon lamented: "I had hoped to acquire this knowledge but, alas, it remained distant from me". The red hefer

ceremony is the classic model of an irrational religious commandment so inexplicable that it remained impervious even to Solomon's wisdom. Though the red hefer ceremony is exceptional, it is also iconic. This ceremony, devoid of any apparent logic, demonstrates, that all commandments, even the so-called logical ones, lie beyond the grasp of human comprehension. The red hefer ceremony merely accentuates the inner illogic of every divine command.

Are Commandments Logical?

Though the Torah rarely provides direct or clear reasons for commandments, each divine instruction possesses a purpose and provides a benefit, either material or spiritual. God doesn't issue arbitrary or capricious mandates, but provides us invaluable guidelines for human behavior. Throughout history, supreme confidence in the rational nature of divine commandments inspired persistent efforts to map the hidden reasons behind divine commandments. Some commandments such as moral laws and the rules governing society appear to be rational, while most commandments such as rituals, dietary laws and marital regulations appear to be less logical. Many scholars, most prominently Maimonides, attempted to uncover the hidden reasons behind all divine commandments. Maimonides' efforts were highly controversial and elicited significant opposition. Some of the backlash stemmed from concerns that attaching reasons to commandments could, potentially, contextualize them and undermine their authority. Opponents of Maimonides worried that when divine instructions are hinged to a particular reason, they are more easily miscast as obsolete once the reasons fade. For divine commandments to be timeless they must be untethered to any specific context, set of customs, or time period. Ironically, Solomon himself failed this test, by misconstruing the reason for a Biblical injunction and incorrectly assuming it didn't apply to him. He justified that the Biblical injunction against marrying an excessive number of wives was only geared to prevent distractions from a king's national responsibilities. Confident in his own ability to attend to his royal duties, Solomon violated this injunction, married too many women and, ultimately, was sidetracked. Solomon's failed gamble is a cautionary tale. Tracing commandments to specific reasons can undermine their timelessness and subject them to selective performance.

Piety and Obedience Additionally, asserting a rational basis for the performance of a divine obligation may dilute the piety of the experience. Divine mandates condition us toward unconditional submission to God and His will. Fulfillment of a divine obligation without fully understanding its underlying reason or without deriving any personal benefit fosters obedience and piety. As the 20th century philosopher, CS Lewis, articulated, "when we have said that God commands things only because they are good, we must add that one of the things intrinsically good is that rational creatures should freely surrender themselves to their Creator in obedience.the mere obeying is also intrinsically good, for, in obeying, a rational creature... reverses the act by which we fell, treads Adam's dance backward, and returns. " The highest "intrinsic good" is to express our obedience to a Higher being. For this reason, the red hefer ceremony is intentionally programmed without rhyme or reason. This illogical ceremony, which rescues us from the world of death, underscores the fact, that humans don't possess all the answers. Just as we have no solution for death, we are similarly limited in our understanding of many other truths. Religion asks us to submit our own limited intellects to a Higher authority whose wisdom lies "beyond", whose thoughts aren't our thoughts and whose ways aren't our ways. Though we strive to discover logic within divine commands we never condition religious observance upon human understanding. Every religious command is similar to the red hefer ceremony: a leap into the unknown, beyond human logic and beyond human comprehension.

Ultimately, religion is dependent upon a leap of faith. Science Never Leaps The modern world is far too rational for leaps of faith. In an ancient world which was dark and confusing, it was obvious that deeper wisdoms lay beyond the reach of human intellect. In that frightening and unpredictable world, truth could only be found at the delicate intersection between rationality and irrationality. Truth was always a blend between observed facts and

articles of faith. Great leaps of the imagination were necessary just to survive. Contemporary culture has been completely reshaped by five centuries of scientific revolution. Our rational world only attributes validity to the facts which empirical experimentation and sensory experience confirm. As John Locke asserted "the only true knowledge that could be accessible to the human mind was that which was based on experience". Strict scientific analysis, based upon unprejudiced experimentation is the only pathway to truth. In our world of stark empiricism, irrational religious leaps of faith seem, to many, foolish and outdated. Empiricism discourages the unverifiable, and therefore, in the modern secular city, religion has gradually collapsed. Very little about faith can be proven. Ironically, once we assume that God spoke with us at Sinai it is completely logical to obey His commands and His word. However, proof of that foundational moment or of the seminal act of creation lies beyond empirical experimentation. It takes courage and higher intellect to accept non-empirical truth. Artificial Intelligence and Human Identity The rise of Artificial Intelligence may have unintended positive consequences for religious belief. Many religious people are legitimately concerned about how AI will affect our religious practice, our view of human identity, and ultimately, our commitment to religion. Ironically AI may help restore the value of non-rational elements of human identity. By creating higher beings of intelligence, whose rational capacities far outstrip human potential, we may more deeply value the non-rational capabilities which make us uniquely human. If rational and cognitive faculties are endowed to machines, they can no longer be viewed as central components of human identity. By offloading rational processing to robots, we may better appreciate human immortality and the distinctly human ability to take leaps of faith and to accept delivered truths from others. Machines can never discern Higher intellect. We, alone, are touched by God, and we alone can find Him through courageous leaps of our imagination. The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York

<https://assets.torahidbits.com/2021/06/09105926/Korach-1423-Taragin.pdf>

Rabbi Moshe Taragin – RAM Yeshivat Har Etzion

Geulas Yisrael #7 Korach, Chassidut and the State of Israel Korach was a roguish demagogue who fomented an angry mob against Moshe's authority. Demagogues typically spew ridiculous claims, baseless accusations and exaggerated truths in riling up their followers. For demagoguery to be successful however, it must contain at least a kernel of the truth or some accurate claims. Otherwise, it loses all its credibility- even in the eyes of the most ardent supporters. Among all of Korach's nonsensical statements, one deeply resonates as true: "the entire nation is holy and is vested with Divine presence". Of course, he manipulated this truth, demanding in turn, that every Jew serve jointly in the mishkan. His propaganda ignored the important concept of religious "specialization". Every Jew is holy, but the mishkan requires very specific prerequisites which not every ordinary person can maintain. Likewise, every commoner is holy, but only certain sainted people like Moshe can achieve prophecy and leadership. None the less, there is a sample of truth to Korach's basic claim. Thousands of years later, Korach's message served as a cornerstone of the Chassidic revolution. In general, all human beings are created in the image of G-d and are imbued with Divine qualities such as free will, consciousness, emotions, intellect, and cognitive speech. Beyond these gifts delivered to every human being, Jews were endowed with unique national traits such as courage and defiance (am k'shei oref), ability to process supernatural information such as prophecy, and enduring compassion. Emboldened with freedom of choice human beings can "take advantage" of these traits or they can squander them. A sinful life wastes these talents and tarnishes our Divine image and our Jewish identity. Based on Kabbalistic ideas, Chassidut introduced a bold new concept: Jews aren't just crafted in the image of G-d; every Jew is imbued with a part of G-d Himself. The metaphor which captures this "Divine imbuing" is the description of Hashem "breathing" into Adam (Vayipach

b'apav). Speaking streams air through our larynx, but Respiration draws air from our "core"; by exhaling into Adam Hashem instilled a part of Himself into Adam and subsequently into every Jew. This Divine "infusion" yields an important principle- sometimes referred to as "segulat yisrael". Being vested with a part of the Divine essence, grants a Jew inalienable virtue. No matter how errant or deviant a Jew's behavior, he remains inherently and intrinsically sacred. This was a radical concept in Jewish thought and a departure from previous views about non-religious Jews. Traditionally "wayward Jews" who exhibited religious delinquency were embraced because of their 'teshuva potential'. As candidates for teshuva and for potential repair, even sinful Jews were incorporated into the Jewish community and the Jewish formula. Chassidut asserted that even "before" turning their hearts back to G-d, and even "without" full halachik compliance, every Jew possessed latent sanctity. Any sins or transgressions were merely extrinsic. Sin can be likened to a glittering stone falling into dirt. The jewel hasn't lost its basic glow, its shine is merely temporarily and externally concealed by the dirt. Chassidut identified the intrinsic and irremovable sanctity of every Jew, thereby creating a concept of Jewish inclusion. For various ideological and historical reasons Chassidut has undergone dramatic changes since its inception nearly 370 years ago. Today's Chassidut communities, are, by and large, far more insular than the images of a community articulated by the movement's founders. However, the intellectual basis of Chassidut is still pivoted upon Korach's legitimate claim about G-d resting within each Jew. The modern State of Israel has reimagined a new version of Korach's claim. Life in Israel includes Jews who do not adhere, by and large, to the classic system of a halacha. Yet every Jew in the State of Israel is a partner in crafting the final arc of Jewish history and in our return to our homeland. The state provides a framework to incorporate Jews who no longer practice the rituals and ceremonies of halacha. As deeply religious Jews, we are certainly saddened by Jews who deviate from halacha, and we certainly dream of a day in which every Jew will turn back to G-d and not only believe in Him but also obey His commandments. However, until that day, we live in Israel together with millions of Jews who reflect Korach's valid claim. Every Jew possesses latent sanctity. Sadly, historical pressures have expunged classic halachik behavior from so many. However, so many non-Orthodox Jews in Israel continue to demonstrate extraordinary commitment to our land, our people and our history. This is a modern glimmer of the sanctity which every Jew possesses. We await a day in which this glimmer will become a more radiant glow. Until that day, a "glimmer" will have to do.

Fw From Hamelaket@gmail.com

Avoiding Controversy, and Attitude Towards Christians

Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The sin of the complainers was particularly severe in God's eyes, because it implied a kind of agreement with Korach and his evil followers * Signs to identify evil people: They tell lies, and see nothing good in those who disagree with them * Love between all people of all religions must be heightened, and most definitely, it is forbidden to spit in front of Christians * Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook and Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky treated Christian clerics with respect and kindness

In the Torah portion Korach (chapter 17), it is explained that after the earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korach and his followers, "The next day the whole Israelite community railed against Moshe and Aaron, saying, "You two have brought death upon God's people!" While they were complaining, suddenly the pillar of cloud descended, covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of God appeared. "But as the community gathered against them, Moshe and Aaron turned toward the Tent of Meeting; the cloud had covered it and the Presence of God appeared." The entire community trembled, and Moshe was called to the sacred place, and Aaron joined him. They still did not know what the meaning of the revelation was. "God spoke to Moshe,

saying: 'Remove yourselves from this community, that I may annihilate them in an instant.' They fell on their faces."

While still falling on his face in a prayer of self-sacrifice for Israel, Moshe realized that the angel of death had already received permission to strike, and while still in prayer, Moshe adjusted himself, and ordered Aaron to burn incense, thereby violating God's command, "refusing an order", and instead of separating from the people – to go towards them with the incense to stop the plague. "Then Moshe 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 God the plague has begun!" Aaron took it, as Moshe 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 Moshe at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, since the plague was checked."

What was the Wrath All About

Israel indeed sinned by complaining about Moshe and Aaron, but still, the question remains: why was this sin considered so severe, to the point they were sentenced to death?

Rather, in their complaint, they included themselves as full partners in the dispute against Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach and his followers were a negligible minority – just a few hundred alone from Israel. Had the people revolted against them, Korach and his followers would have retreated in shame, and no dispute would have developed. This is how Israel should have behaved, after all the good they received in that generation through Moshe Rabbeinu. However, they stood by and saw how Korach and his followers shamed Moshe and Aharon, and remained silent. There was even fear they would kill Moshe and Aaron, since during the events of the controversy there were situations in which Moshe and Aaron stood alone in front of Korach's hundreds of followers; but even then, Israel remained silent, and let the disputants threaten Moshe and Aaron and stir up the people, until Moshe Rabbeinu had to ask for God's help, namely, that He punish Korach's followers so everyone would know that His Torah was true.

After all this, the Israelites still dared to complain about the harsh death of those who disagreed with Moshe, and then, God repaid them for keeping silent and not protesting, and for causing a dispute that endangered the future of the people and heritage of the Torah. And although there were very respectable people among Korach's followers, the people should have chosen Moshe, and strongly protested those who rose against him.

The Wife of On ben Pelet

On ben Pelet was initially a participant in the controversy, and was supposed to perish together with Korach and his followers, but his wife saved him (Sanhedrin 109b). This is how our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz'l, recounted the incident: "His wife was a tzaddeket (a righteous woman), and he was saved in her merit. At first, he was swayed after the 'gang', and his wife begged him not to enter the dispute, yet, he could not cease. He said to her: Soon, they will come to call for me. His wife answered him: I will sit outside our tent with chutzpah, indecently, with my hair uncovered, and being "tzaddikim", when they see this, they will run away. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. In previous generations, and even today, the dispute-mongers are considered "tzaddikim". Our Sages call them rasha'im (evil), but they are erroneously termed "tzaddikim", or "haredim" "(Sichot Ha'Ritz'ya, Bamidbar, p. 195).

Signs of Evil Dispute-Mongers

The problem is, it is not always easy to know who the dissidents are who endanger Israel, since they know how to misrepresent their words, to the point where it is difficult to discern their malice. The more serious problem is that they also tend to convince themselves, to the point where they are unable to discern their increasingly evil ways.

The sign of a dispute for the sake of heaven, like the dispute between Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel, is that the disputants focus on the substantive debate,

but beyond the debate, respect one another, and see the good in each of them. On the other hand, the clear sign of an evil dispute that is not for heaven's sake, is that the disputants do not respect one another, and as a result, do not recognize the good sides of those who disagree with them.

Another sign of baalei machloket (dispute-mongers) is that they lie. Some of them lie maliciously, thinking that for the sake of their "holy" purpose, it is appropriate to lie and slander the other party. Some of them lie accidentally – since they only see badly of the other side, any evil rumor about it is accepted without proper investigation, and consequently, they spread lies. Indeed, inaccuracies can be found in almost every person, but among baalei machloket, we find people who regularly lie and insult, and even when it turns out they are wrong, do not draw conclusions, but immediately move on to a new claim – which most probably is also false.

The Duty to Criticize, and Stay Away from Baalei Machloket

In absence of condemning the wicked, the righteous have no chance of winning, since according to logic, every struggle between the righteous and the wicked should seemingly end in victory of the wicked. After all, a righteous person has moral inhibitions: he cannot lie and spread slander, and cannot take revenge, punish, or eliminate opponents.

However, the righteous do have one advantage: the moral advantage. They can define evil. And since values, truth and justice carry crucial importance, the determination that so-and-so adopts immoral positions will gradually cause the evil to be weakened, until it is completely abolished. It thus turns out that when the righteous act according to the rules of morality, they win. There is no need for a lot of work – just define the nature of the evil of the disputant and express it publicly, quietly and calmly, and the truth will take its course. However, if the righteous concede their right to morally define evil, they have no chance of winning.

Respect for Humanity – For Christians as Well

Q: Recently, cases of Jews spitting on Christian tourists were published. Is it permissible to behave in such a way according to the Torah?

A: It is forbidden to humiliate people, and whoever does so is a sinner. "They said about Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai that no one ever preceded him in issuing a greeting, not even a non-Jew in the marketplace, as Rabban Yohanan would always greet him first" (Berakhot 17a). In the days of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, all Christians were idolaters, and even so, he was careful to precede them with a greeting. For certain, he did not humiliate them, or spit on them. It is also stated in Tractate Avot: "Shammai used to say... and receive all men with a pleasant countenance" (1:15). "All men" includes all human beings, without exception.

All the more so when it comes to tourists who are guests of the State of Israel, and generally, come here out of respect for the people of Israel. Our Sages said that the guests that Abraham our forefather ran to receive, appeared to him to be lowly worshipers of idolatry who bowed down to the dust on their feet (Bava Metzia 86b), but despite this, he greatly respected them, observed the mitzvah of hosting guests, and as a result, merited receiving the good news about the birth of Isaac.

This is the opportunity to mention the words of Maran Rabbi Kook, about the attitude of love and respect that should be shown towards members of other religions (Middot Haraya: Ahava 10). In his words, he explained that it is necessary to love all creatures created by God, and especially man, and this love "should spread to all people, despite all differences of opinions, religions and beliefs, and despite all the divisions of races, and environments." Not only that, Rabbi Kook further explained that love of Israel should also be based on a general love for all human beings, "because only in a soul rich in love of mankind and love of humanity, can the love of the nation be exalted in its noble genius, and spiritual and practical greatness." On the other hand, "stinginess that causes one to see in everything outside the perimeter of the special nation, even if it is outside the boundary of Israel, only ugliness and impurity, is one of the terrible darkness's that cause a general destruction of the entire building of spiritual goodness, whose light, every gentle soul anticipates."

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky and his Attitude towards Christian Nuns

The story is told about Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky ztz"l, one of the heads of the Council of Torah Sages of Agudath Yisrael in the United States, who respected every person, "even Christians were given full respect, and a pleasant countenance. One day a resident of Monsey was surprised when he was stopped in the street by the Mother Superior of the monastery located on the street where Rabbi Yaakov lived. She sought to understand why the monastery's Jewish neighbors looked away, or crossed the street, whenever a nun passed by. Everyone – except for one old rabbi, who always makes sure to greet them with a smile and a friendly greeting" (Sefer Rabbi Ya'akov p. 327).

Rabbi Kaminetzky (1891-1986) was born in Lithuania, and studied at the Slavodka and Slutsk yeshivas. He was a rabbi in Lithuania, afterwards immigrated to the United States, and was a rabbi in Seattle, and later in Toronto. For many years, he headed the 'Torah ve Daat' yeshiva in New York. He was known as a gaon (Torah genius) in iyun (in-depth analysis) and halakha, and for his middot tovot (excellent character traits).

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

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Jun 22, 2023, 6:02 PM

Let There Be Life! - Essay by Rabbi YY

The Rebbe's Advice for the Boy Who Smoked on Shabbos By: Rabbi YY Jacobson Stop Pounding Rabbi Sam Wolfson was giving his speech to the Jewish Federation about the "Tragedy of Jewish Assimilation." Toward the end of his long speech, the Rabbi clapped his hands... waited 10 seconds... and clapped his hands again.

The Audience looked puzzled. The Rabbi then explained that every time he clapped his hands some Jew married a non-Jew.

Immediately Morris jumped up from his seat in the audience and shouted, "Nu... So Stop With Your Clapping!"

A Blossoming Staff

It is a baffling story. The portion of Korach tells of the "Test of the Staffs" conducted when people contested Aaron's appointment to the High Priesthood. G-d instructs Moses to take a staff from each tribe, each inscribed with the name of the tribe's leader; Aaron's name was written on the Levite Tribe's staff. The sticks were placed overnight in the Holy of Holies in the Sanctuary. When they were removed the following morning, the entire nation beheld that Aaron's staff had blossomed overnight and bore fruit, demonstrating that Aaron was G-d's choice for High Priest.

In the words of the Torah (Numbers 16): "And on the following day Moses came to the Tent of Testimony, and behold, Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed! It gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds. Moses took out all the staffs from before the Lord, to the children of Israel; they saw and they took, each man his staff."

What was the meaning of this strange miracle? G-d could have chosen many ways to demonstrate the authenticity of Aaron's position.

What is more, three previous incidents have already proven this very truth: the swallowing of Korach and his fellow rebels who staged a revolt against Moses and Aaron; the burning of the 250 leaders who led the mutiny; and the epidemic that spread among those who accused Moses and Aaron of killing the nation. If these three miracles did not suffice, what would a fourth one possibly achieve? What then was the point and message of the blossoming stick?

One answer I heard from my teacher was this: The blossoming of the staff was meant not so much to prove who the high priest is (that was already established by three previous earth-shattering events), but rather to demonstrate what it takes to be chosen as a high priest of G-d, and to explain why it was Aaron was chosen to this position. What are the qualifications required to be a leader?

From Death to Life

Before being severed from the tree, this staff grew, produced leaves, and was full of vitality. But now, severed from its roots, it has become dry and lifeless.

The primary quality of a Kohen Gadol, of a High Priest, of a man of G-d, is his or her ability to transform lifeless sticks into living orchards. The real leader is the person who sees the possibility for growth and life where others see stagnation and lifelessness. The Jewish leader perceives even in a dead stick the potential for rejuvenation.

Let There Be Life

How relevant this story is to our generation.

Following the greatest tragedy ever to have struck our people, the Holocaust, the Jewish world appeared like a lifeless staff. Mounds and mounds of ashes, the only remains of the six million, left a nation devastated to its core. An entire world went up in smoke.

What happened next will one day be told as one of the great acts of reconstruction in the history of mankind. Holocaust survivors and refugees set about rebuilding on new soil the world they had seen go up in the smoke of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

One of the remarkable individuals who spearheaded this revival was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), whose 29th yartzeit is this Thursday, the third of Tammuz, June 22. The Rebbe, together with other great Jewish sages and leaders from many diverse communities, refused to yield to despair. While others responded to the Holocaust by building memorials, endowing lectureships, convening conferences, and writing books – all vital and noble tributes to create memories of a tree which once lived but was now dead -- the Rebbe urged every person he could touch to bring the stick back to life: to marry and have lots of children, to rebuild Jewish life in every possible way. He built schools, communities, synagogues, Jewish centers, summer camps, and yeshivas, and encouraged and inspired countless Jews to do the same. He opened his heart to an orphaned generation, imbuing it with hope, vision, and determination. He became the most well-known address for scores of activists, rabbis, philanthropists, leaders, influential people, and laymen and women from all walks of life – giving them the confidence to reconstruct a shattered universe. He sent out emissaries to virtually every Jewish community in the world to help rekindle the Jewish smile when a vast river of tears threatened to obliterate it.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe urged his beloved people to use the horrors of destruction as an impetus to generate the greatest Jewish renaissance and to create "re-Jew-venation." He gazed at a dead staff and saw in it the potential for new life.

His new home, the United States, was a country that until then had dissolved Jewish identity. It was, as they used to say in those days, a "treifene medinah," a non-kosher land. Yet the Rebbe saw the possibility of using American culture as a medium for new forms of Jewish activity, using modern means to spread Yiddishkeit. The Rebbe realized that the secularity of the modern world concealed a deep yearning for spirituality, and he knew how to address it. Where others saw the crisis of a dead staff, he saw an opportunity for a new wave of renewal and redemption.

The Phoenix

Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky, one of the Rebbe's secretaries, related the following episode.

"It was around 1973, when the widow of Jacques Lifschitz, the renowned sculptor, had come for a private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, shortly after her husband's sudden passing.

"In the course of her meeting with the Rebbe, she mentioned that when her husband died, he was nearing completion of a massive sculpture of a phoenix in the abstract, a work commissioned by Hadassah Women's Organization for the Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus, in Jerusalem.

"As an artist and sculptor in her own right, she said that she would have liked to complete her husband's work, but, she told the Rebbe, she had been advised by Jewish leaders that the phoenix is a non-Jewish symbol. It could never be placed in Jerusalem!"

"I was standing near the door to the Rebbe's office that night, when he called for me and asked that I bring him the book of Job, from his bookshelf, which I did.

"The Rebbe turned to Chapter 29, verse 18, "I shall multiply my days like the Chol."

"And then the Rebbe proceeded to explain to Mrs. Lifschitz the Midrashic commentary on this verse which describes the Chol as a bird that lives for a thousand years, then dies, and is later resurrected from its ashes. Clearly then, a Jewish symbol."

"Mrs. Lifschitz was absolutely delighted. The project was completed soon thereafter."

In his own way, the Rebbe had brought new hope to this broken widow. And in the recurring theme of his life, he did the same for the spirit of the Jewish people, which he raised from the ashes of the Holocaust to new, invigorated life. He attempted to reenact the "miracle of the blossoming staff" every day of his life with every person he came in contact with.

To Expel or Not to Expel?

A story:

Rabbi Berel Baumgarten (d. in 1978) was a Jewish educator in an orthodox religious yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY, prior to relocating to Buenos Aires. He once wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking for advice. Each Shabbos afternoon, when he would meet up with his students for a study session, one student would walk into the room smelling from cigarette smoke. Clearly, he was smoking on the Shabbos. "His influence may cause his religious class-mates to also cease keeping the Shabbos," Rabbi Baumgarten was concerned.

"Must I expel him from the school, even with the lack of clear evidence that he is violating the Shabbos?"

The Rebbe's answer was no more than a scholarly reference: "See Avos Derabi Noson chapter 12." That's it.

Avos Derabi Noson is a Talmudic tractate, an addendum to the Ethics of the Fathers, composed in the 4th century CE by a Talmudic sage known as Reb Nasan Habavli (hence the name Avos Derabi Noson.) I was curious to understand the Rebbe's response. Rabbi Baumgarten was looking for practical advice, and the Rebbe is sending him to an ancient text...

I opened an Avos Derabi Noson to that particular chapter. I found a story told there about Aaron, our very own High Priest of Israel.

Aaron, the sages relate, brought back many Jews from a life of sin to a life of purity. He was the first one in Jewish history to make "baalei teshuvah," to inspire Jews to re-embrace their heritage, faith, and inner spiritual mission. But, unlike today, during Aaron's times to be a sinner you had to be a real no-goodnik. Because the Jews of his generation have seen G-d in His full glory; and to rebel against the Torah way of life was a sign of true betrayal and carelessness.

How then did Aaron do it? He would greet each person warmly. Even a grand sinner would be greeted by Aaron with tremendous grace and love. Aaron would embrace these so-called "Jewish sinners" with endless warmth and respect. The following day when this person would crave to sin, he would say to himself: How will I be able to look Aaron in the eyes after I commit such a serious sin? I am too ashamed. He holds me in such high moral esteem, how can I deceive him and let him down? And this person would abstain from immoral behavior.

He Gave Them Dignity

We come here full circle: Aaron was a leader, a High Priest, because even his staff blossomed. He never gave up on the dried-out sticks. He never looked at someone and said, "This person is a lost cause, he is completely cut off from his tree, of any possibility of growth. He is dry, brittle, and lifeless." For Aaron, even dry sticks would blossom and produce fruit.

This is the story related in Avos Derabi Noson. This was the story the Lubavitcher Rebbe wanted Rabbi Berel Baumgarten to study and internalize. Should I expel the child from school was his question; he is, Jewishly speaking, a dried-out and one tough stick!

The response of an Aaron is this: Love him even more. Embrace him with every fiber of your being, open your heart to him, cherish him and shower him with warmth and affection. Appreciate him, respect him and let him feel that you really care for him. See in him or her that which he or she may not be able to see in themselves at the moment. View him as a great human being, and you know what? He will become just that.

*) The nucleus of this idea was presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to a group of young Jewish girls—the graduates of Beis Rivkah High School and counselors of Camp Emunah in the Catskill Mountains, in NY, on Thursday, Parshas Korach, 28 Sivan, 5743, June 9, 1983.

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

date: Jun 22, 2023, 6:08 PM

subject: Rav Frand - A Person Can Gain or Lose His World in One Moment

Parshas Korach

A Person Can Gain or Lose His World in One Moment

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1254 – Why Shouldn't You Park In a Handicap Space? Good Shabbos! The Ramban on the pasuk "And the earth opened its mouth and it swallowed them and their houses and all the men that were with Korach..." (Bamidbar 16:32) points out that any person associated with Korach was swallowed up when the ground opened. They were punished together with the rest of his property.

Ironically, however, the Ramban says that this dramatic punishment did not affect Korach's own sons, as it is written in Parshas Pinchas "And the sons of Korach did not die." (Bamidbar 26:11) Even though they were initially part of Korach's assembly, there were spared because they were "great righteous men" whose merit saved them. What happened to Korach's sons? How were they saved?

The Medrash (Yalkut Shimon) says that their merit stemmed from the fact that when Korach was initially plotting his rebellion in the presence of his sons, Moshe came in and they covered their faces. They had the following dilemma: If we stand up in the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu (as protocol would demand for the Gadol Hador), this would shame our father, Moshe's antagonist, and we are obligated to honor our father. On the other hand, if we do not stand up for Moshe, we would violate the pasuk "Mipnei seivah takum..." (Vayikra 19:32) What should we do?

The Medrash relates that they decided to honor Moshe Rabbeinu even though it would shame their father. At that moment, they had pangs of repentance (hirhurei teshuva), as King David said, "My heart acquired a good matter..." (Tehillim 45:2)

I will share two comments on this Medrash:

1. Why did they choose to give honor to Moshe Rabbeinu over their father? Why did Moshe win out in the end? I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai that this shows the power of the chinuch (education) of a home. Rashi says that Korach was amongst those who carried the Aron Kodesh (Ark) during the travels in the Wilderness. Any person who carried the Aron Kodesh had to be extremely careful about one thing: Kavod HaTorah. Someone who does not treat the Torah with the proper deference and honor died on the spot when lifting the Aron Kodesh. It was like carrying something that was radioactive. If you did not take the proper precautions, it could kill you. There was something that permeated the house of Korach more than anything else: Kavod HaTorah. Kavod HaTorah. Kavod HaTorah. When you get something in your mother's milk, when that becomes the raison d'être of your house – it becomes so important to you that it trumps everything else in your life. So, when they had this dilemma – Kavod haTorah vs. Kibud Av v'Em, Kavod haTorah won out. This is the first observation.

2. The other observation is recognizing how much a person can accomplish with a single minute. That one minute in the lives of Korach's sons, in which they were overcome with Kavod haTorah, saved their lives, and – as the Ramban says – they were considered tzadikim as a result of that. Shmuel

haNavi descended from them. All because of that action expressing Kavod haTorah to Moshe Rabbeinu, which transpired in one minute! That is what a person can accomplish with one minute.

We frequently mention the Gemara, “A person can acquire his world in a single moment.” (Avodah Zarah 10b) A single moment can change a person’s life, but unfortunately it cuts both ways. That which a person might do or say in one minute can cause him irreversible eternal damage as well. How long do you think the whole story of Korach took? The whole story took place in less than a single day. How do we know that? The pasuk says that Korach had a complaint against Moshe Rabbeinu which led him to start a rebellion. Moshe responded to Korach “(Come) morning and Hashem will make known who belongs to Him...” (Bamidbar 16:5). Rashi notes: Why the emphasis on “morning”? This argument started in the evening. Why did Moshe wait until the next morning to put an end to it?

Rashi explains that Moshe’s motivation was that maybe they would sleep on it overnight and change their minds. He stated that the afternoon was a time of drunkenness, not an appropriate time for reaching momentous decisions. What happened? On the contrary, Korach engaged his followers with mockery of Moshe the entire night. (Does a house that is full of sefarim need a mezuzah? Does a garment that is entirely techeiles require tzisis?) The earth swallowed Korach and his followers the next morning.

Korach was a tzadik, a very prestigious individual. Yet his whole life went down the tube in less than 24 hours. Consider a tale of two categories of people: The Bnei Korach changed in less than one minute. They had a hirhur teshuva. They decided to honor Moshe Rabbeinu. They got a grip on themselves and saved their lives and the lives of their descendants in one minute. Korach let it go all down the drain in less than 24 hours.

A person can acquire his world in a moment, and a person can destroy his world in a moment. This is a scary thought.

Holiness and Machlokes Have Nothing to Do With Each Other

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) says that the wife of Ohn ben Peles (one of the co-conspirators of Korach listed at the beginning of the parsha (Bamidbar 16:1) but not later on) saved him from utter destruction. She came to her husband and said, “Listen here. You have nothing to gain out of this. Regardless of whoever comes out on top here, you will just be second or third or fourth fiddle. Either Moshe Rabbeinu will come out on top and you will stay in the same position or Korach will come out on top and you will stay in the same position. What difference does it make to you?”

Ohn ben Peles (who was probably not the sharpest knife in the shed) responded. “Do you know what? You’re right. But I am already too far into this. How do I get out of it?” The famous Gemara records the response of Mrs. Ohn ben Peles. “Don’t worry. I will take care of you.” She got her husband drunk with wine until he fell asleep. When the band of Korach’s followers came around to pick up Ohn ben Peles, his wife sat by the door of her house and uncovered the hair of her head.

Korach’s followers saw this woman sitting by the door with her hair uncovered. They could not proceed any further into the house so they immediately went on their way. That is how she saved Ohn ben Peles. The sefer Siach Yaakov brings two observations, which, in a sense, are contradictory.

Observation #1: Note the great level of the kedusha that resided in Am Yisrael at that time. People who were not fazed by the prospect of challenging the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu as the nation’s leader, nevertheless, would not approach a woman who was immodestly dressed.

Observation #2: Note the great power of machlokes. People who are so holy that they don’t want to look at an immodestly dressed woman, are nevertheless willing to go ahead and fight with Moshe Rabbeinu. In other words, when even the holiest Jews get involved in machlokes, nothing else counts.

Sometimes Speeches Don’t Help

My final observation has to do with this week’s Haftorah. The Haftorah for Parshas Korach is Shmuel I 11:14 – 12:22. The people come to Shmuel asking for a king. Shmuel lambasts them. He challenges the people to name

an incident where he ever cheated any of them or took anything from them. The people were forced to admit that he never oppressed them or took anything from them. They confessed that Shmuel had always been honest with them.

Why is this the Haftorah for Parshas Korach?

This is the Haftorah for Parshas Korach because there is a similar pasuk in our Parsha. “This distressed Moshe greatly and he said to Hashem: ‘Do not turn to their gift offering. I have not taken the donkey of any of them, nor have I wronged even one of them.’” (Bamidbar 16:15) This is the parallel. But the question must be asked: If Shmuel makes the speech to the people and the speech convinces them and they need to admit that Shmuel was right that he never took anything from them, why didn’t Moshe Rabbeinu make the same speech to the people (he only expressed his frustration to Hashem in the above cited pasuk)? It worked for Shmuel. The people confessed that he was right. Why would the same speech not also work for Moshe? Why did he feel that he needed this miracle of the land opening up and swallowing them to put down this rebellion?

The difference between these two situations is that Shmuel was not dealing with a machlokes. When people are not involved in a machlokes it is possible to reason with them. You can then speak to the people and make a case to them. But Moshe Rabbeinu was dealing with rebellion – an open machlokes. When people are acrimonious, they are not reasonable. A person can make the most powerful and eloquent speeches but they will fall on deaf ears. It is like people’s brains shut off. Or perhaps their ears shut off. Something shuts off.

Shmuel HaNavi was dealing with people to which he could still speak. He could make a speech: “Who’s donkey have I taken?” Moshe Rabbeinu was dealing with disputants in a machlokes. In that situation, speeches don’t help. The only thing that helps is opening the earth and swallowing them. That is the distinction between Moshe Rabbeinu’s situation and that of Shmuel HaNavi.

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Medicines on Shabbos

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Vitamin E oil

“May I rub Vitamin E oil on Shabbos into my skin to alleviate some discomfort?”

Question #2: Mixed before Shabbos

“May I mix a medicine into food before Shabbos and then take it on Shabbos?”

Introduction

In parshas Chukas, the Torah teaches that when the Bnei Yisroel complained against Hashem and Moshe for taking them through the desert without adequate provisions and for providing them with mann, a plague of poisonous snakes was unleashed among them and killed many Jews. When the Jews did teshuvah and asked Moshe to daven on their behalf, Hashem commanded him to make a snake out of copper and place it on top of a pole. Subsequently, anyone bitten by a poisonous snake would look at the copper snake and live.

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 29a) comments: Does the copper snake determine life and death? No, it does not. When people looked in its direction, they were reminded of Hashem, prayed to Him and survived the bite.

Later in history, an image of a snake wrapped around the upper end of a pole became the international symbol of an apothecary or other medical facility. Obviously, this is the perfect week to discuss the halachos of using medicines on Shabbos, particularly since the work of the pharmacist is the basis for this halachic discussion.

Don’t take your medicine!

The Mishnah and Gemara allude to a prohibition that Chazal instituted not to take medicines on Shabbos. For example, the Mishnah (Shabbos 111a) records the following:

Someone whose teeth are causing him pain may not sip vinegar as a remedy, but is permitted to dip his food into vinegar in his usual method of eating; there is no concern if this accomplishes his purpose of using the vinegar as an analgesic. From this Mishnah, we see that Chazal prohibited doing anything that is clearly performed to alleviate pain or discomfort. This prohibition is called “refuah” by the poskim.

The Gemara concludes that it is prohibited to sip vinegar only if he spits it out, but it is permitted to sip vinegar and swallow it, since people sometimes do this to arouse a greater appetite.

From a different passage of Gemara (Beitzah 22a), we see that this prohibition also exists on Yom Tov. This article will attempt to clarify the rabbinic prohibition of refuah on Shabbos. Explaining this topic adequately requires two introductory lists: Hierarchy of prohibitions

To begin with, we need to understand that there are different levels of prohibition that are set aside for the needs of a person who is ill. First, I will list these, and then afterward, we will see what rules apply to permit these activities – in other words, how ill must a person be to permit them.

A. De'oraisa - A Jew performing an action that is usually prohibited on Shabbos min haTorah.

B. Derabbanan - A Jew performing a rabbinic prohibition.

C. Derabbanan with a shinuy - A Jew performing a rabbinic prohibition in an unusual way.

D. Amrah lenachri - Asking a non-Jew to do something that a Jew is not permitted to do.

E. Refuah - An action that is prohibited solely because it serves a medical purpose.

Hierarchy of conditions

According to most poskim, levels of “illness” or “wellness” are classified under five categories (cf. Eglei Tal, Meleches Tochein 17, 18 and notes who disagrees). I am listing these beginning from the category that is most severe medically, where the halacha is most lenient:

1. Choli she'yeish bo sakana

Any medical condition or situation that might be a threat to life, even if remote, is called a choli she'yeish bo sakana. In this situation, we perform whatever is necessary to make the patient safe and properly treated. In other words, none of the categories of activities above is prohibited, and it is meritorious and required to perform whatever is necessary as quickly as possible to save the patient (pikuach nefesh).

What type of condition qualifies as choli she'yeish bo sakana?

In general, an internal injury is assumed to be pikuach nefesh until determined otherwise (Avodah Zarah 28a, see Tur, Orach Chayim 328). Excess or unusual internal pain is similarly assumed to be pikuach nefesh until determined otherwise. The extensive details germane to these situations will not be dealt with in this article.

2. Sakanas eiver

This is a situation in which there is no threat to a person's life, but he runs the risk of losing the use of part of his body irreversibly, if it is left untreated. Contemporary authorities rule that this category includes a patient in which the result may be a limp or permanent weakness in a limb (Chut Hashani, Volume 4, 89:27), and even if this result is only a possibility (Minchas Shelomoh, Volume 2:34:36).

The Shulchan Aruch quotes several opinions regarding what the halacha is germane to this situation. He concludes that although violating Torah law is permitted only when there is risk, albeit remote, to someone's life, violating any rabbinic prohibitions is permitted in a situation of sakanas eiver (Orach Chayim 328:17). This includes asking a non-Jew to do anything for his needs (Ran, Shabbos 39b s.v. Umeisha). It goes without saying that the prohibition not to take medicines does not apply to this category. In other words, to treat this patient, all categories of prohibitions listed above, except for level A, are permitted.

To the best of my knowledge, the approach preferred by the Shulchan Aruch is accepted by all the subsequent authorities (Rema, Magen Avraham, Taz, Gra, Nishmas Adam 69:1, et al.).

3. Choleh kol gufo she'ein bo sakana

This refers to a condition in which someone is ill in a way that affects his entire body, such as he is ill enough to go to bed (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 328:17). It also includes situations in which the discomfort is intense enough that he feels that his entire body is affected (Rema ad locum), he is running a fever that is higher than his usual body temperature (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 33:1) or if, without medical intervention, he will end up with a condition similar to one of those mentioned above (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah 33:1). In addition, a child, an elderly person or someone whose general condition is weak may be in this category.

In this situation of choleh kol gufo, we find differing opinions among the rishonim regarding how lenient the halacha is. All authorities agree that a choleh kol gufo may ask a non-Jew to do something for him (level D), and it is prohibited for a Jew to perform on Shabbos or Yom Tov a melacha min haTorah for this patient (level A). The Rosh was uncertain whether you can perform an issur derabbanan other than asking a non-Jew, and Rashi may have been stringent regarding this issue (levels B and C, see Eglai Tal, Meleches Tochein #36 and #38). On the other hand, the Rambam rules that any issur derabbanan is permitted. The Ramban splits the difference, permitting a Jew to do a melacha only with a shinuy, in other words, permitting level C and forbidding level B.

The Shulchan Aruch concludes, according to the Ramban, that an activity that is ordinarily prohibited because of a rabbinic injunction may be performed by a Jew in an indirect way (i.e., with a shinuy). Furthermore, a non-Jew can be asked to do anything for his needs (Ramban and Rashba, Shabbos 129a). In addition, the prohibition of performing a refuah activity does not exist for this person when no other melacha activity is involved. In other words, to treat this patient, all categories listed above, except for levels A and B, are permitted.

4. Meichush

The word meichush means an ache, and carries with it the inference that it is a relatively minor discomfort. The term also includes someone who is mildly ill, but does not pass the threshold of the previous category of choleh kol gufo. One of the terms used to describe this category is that the person is walking around like a healthy person – he does not appear to be ill, but he is suffering from some minor ailment. If it is clearly noticeable that he is in pain or that he is experiencing discomfort, he is not in the category of meichush, but in the previous category of choleh kol gufo.

A meichush does not permit performing any melacha activity, even one that is prohibited only because of a rabbinic decree. Furthermore, he may not attempt to alleviate the discomfort by use of any treatment being performed for that purpose. This is referred to as the prohibition against refuah, established by Chazal. In other words, to treat this patient, all categories listed above are prohibited.

5. Bari

This refers to someone who is perfectly healthy, but would like to do something that is usually considered a medicinal-type act to maintain or bolster his health. All authorities agree that a person may not perform a melacha activity for this purpose, whether the activity is forbidden min haTorah or miderabbanan. There is a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch and the Magen Avraham whether the special prohibition of refuah, i.e., preparing or taking medicinal aids or doing healing acts, applies to someone who is not sick. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 328:37) rules that it does not; the prohibition to perform refuah applies only to someone who qualifies as being a bit ill. The Magen Avraham concludes that the prohibition of refuah applies, also, to someone who is completely well, but wants to do something that would usually be considered a medicinal type of activity.

In other words, a person who is healthy may certainly not do anything in categories A-D to enhance or bolster his health. Whether the prohibition of refuah, category E, applies is a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch, who is lenient, and the Magen Avraham, who rules strictly. As there does not appear to be a consensus among halachic authorities which approach to follow, I recommend that our readers consult with their rav or posek for halachic guidance.

Why are medicines prohibited on Shabbos?

The rest of this article will focus on explaining what I called above “Category E”: the rabbinic prohibition to do anything on Shabbos that is usually performed for medical reasons.

First we want to understand: Why did Chazal establish this prohibition?

The Gemara (Shabbos 53b) implies that the reason for the prohibition of refuah on Shabbos is because preparing medicines often involves crushing raw herbs, thus violating the melacha of grinding. This reason is mentioned by the primary early rishonim in several places (Rashi, Brachos 36b, Shabbos 108b, Beitzah 11b, Avodah Zarah 28a; Tosafos, Shabbos 64b, 93a, Eiruvin 102b; Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 21:2; Rashba, Shabbos 129a; Rosh, Avodah Zarah 2:10). Other authorities provide an additional reason for the prohibition: at times, the application of a medicinal preparation involves a different melacha activity, that of memarei'ach, smearing and smoothing the salve onto the skin (Chaye Adam 69:1).

The discussion about this prohibition is scattered across many different places in the Gemara, and the conclusions are explained in Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chayim, Chapters 327 and 328.

At this point, we will return to the Mishnah I quoted above (Shabbos 111a): Someone whose teeth are causing him pain may not sip vinegar as a remedy, but he is permitted to dip his food into vinegar in his usual method of eating; there is no concern if this accomplishes his purpose of using the vinegar as an analgesic. Someone experiencing pain in the sides of his body may not smear wine or vinegar as a remedy, but he may apply oil as long as it is not rose oil.

Based on our previous discussion, we now know that this Mishnah is discussing someone who is uncomfortable because of a toothache or minor irritation on his side, but who does not qualify as a *choleh kol gufo* -- in other words, what we called before someone suffering from a *meichush* (category 4). We also see another very important principle: An activity that would commonly be done for a non-medical reason may be done notwithstanding that the person intends to alleviate thereby pain or discomfort -- a medical reason.

Rashi explains that people smear oil on their bodies for other than medical reasons, but not wine, vinegar or rose oil. Wine and vinegar were smeared only for medical reasons, and rose oil was not smeared for non-medical reasons, because it was too expensive to use for this purpose. Therefore, smearing wine, vinegar or rose oil is clearly for a medical reason, and is included under the rabbinic prohibition of *refuah*, but smearing other oils is not.

Incidentally, we see from this Mishnah that there is no prohibition of *memarei'ach* when rubbing oil into your skin on Shabbos. This is explained by halachic authorities to be permitted because oil is too thin to smooth out surfaces. Since this is not our topic for today's article, we will not spend more time on it.

Individual circumstances

Whether something is done usually for medical purposes or not might be subjective. In certain societies, there are things that are considered a normal activity, whereas in others, the same activity would not be done except as a medical treatment. How do we determine what is a "normal activity?"

The answer to this question is found in the continuation of the Mishnah, which states: Princes may smear rose oil on their injuries, because they smear it on regular days, even without a medical purpose. Rabbi Shimon rules that all Jews are treated like

princes, and that therefore they may all smear rose oil as a medical treatment.

Both the first tanna and Rabbi Shimon agree that an activity that is sometimes performed for non-medical reasons may be done to alleviate a discomfort. Therefore, princes, who might apply rose oil not as a medical treatment, may use it to alleviate discomfort, whereas, according the first tanna, common folk ,may not. Rabbi Shimon permits someone to do something that a different person would be doing for non-medical reasons, whereas the first tanna requires that he, himself, would do this activity on other occasions when not uncomfortable.

Notwithstanding Rabbi Shimon's position, the majority of early authorities and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim) conclude according to the first tanna's opinion: someone can do something to alleviate discomfort only if he, himself, might do the same for a non-medical purpose.

Vitamin E oil

Thus, we can now answer our opening question: "May I rub Vitamin E oil on Shabbos into my skin to alleviate some discomfort?"

The answer is that it will depend: If people do rub Vitamin E oil when there is no medical discomfort, this would be permitted. I believe that this is not standard practice, and therefore it would seem to me that this is prohibited on Shabbos, unless the person is a *choleh kol gufo*.

Local circumstances

We see from this part of the Mishnah that when an act is performed commonly for non-medical reasons, someone may do it on Shabbos to alleviate discomfort or for a different medical reason. The Gemara expands this by noting that Rav permitted people in his town to smear rose oil on Shabbos, because where he lived it was plentiful, inexpensive and was used commonly without medical need. We see that local circumstances can determine what is permitted typical use.

Does this concept apply only *lekulah* or even *lechumrah*? Is an activity that is common for non-medical reasons, be performed in a geographic location where it is done only to alleviate discomfort? The answer is that this concept is true also *lechumrah*: the Rema (Orach Chayim 327:1) prohibits rubbing oil on the body on Shabbos if locally this is done only for medical reasons.

From this discussion, we see that a Shabbos prohibition existed even to use a medicinal process or aid whose preparation did not involve the *melacha* of grinding. We also see that an item that might be used by a healthy person is not included in the prohibition, and that determining whether a substance may be used or not can be dependent on local circumstances.

May I mix?

At this point, let us address the second of our opening questions: "May I mix a medicine into food before Shabbos and then take it on Shabbos?"

Based on an extensive analysis of one of the sugyos, Rav Moshe Feinstein permits mixing a medicine into food before Shabbos and eating the food on Shabbos, since people see him eating regular food. Rav Moshe demonstrates that the mixing of the food must be before Shabbos, not on Shabbos itself (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:86).

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding this particular prohibition, created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from major sins.

"טלית שכלה תכלת" Parshat Korach: A Talit of Pure Techelet:

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 Leviyyim 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'uven. 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'uven side. Furthermore, in the end of Moshe's first short speech to the rebels, he says, "You have much already, sons of Levi," making it sound as if he is speaking only to one part of the rebel group. At

this point, however, we have no information about what the Re'uvein side of the rebellion might want. Our impression that this first complaint is only half the story is further reinforced by Moshe's second little speech, in which he addresses "the sons of Levi" and accuses them of greed in seeking also the priesthood.

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

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

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

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

NOT SO FAST:

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

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

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

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

DIGGING DEEPER:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hashem, listening to Miriam's lashon 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

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';
 Seforo - 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 korbanot. 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 korbanot 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 korbanot - 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 teyfen 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 "eyyah" 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 "eyyah" 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 "eyyah" 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 Reuben. 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 Reuben. 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:

| | GROUP ONE | GROUP TWO |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Members: | 250 men | Datan & Aviram + followers |
| Claim : | priesthood | new political leadership |
| Against: | Aharon | Moshe |
| Reason: | spiritual equality | failure of leadership |
| Location: | Ohel Moed | shevet Reuben |
| 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 Datan & 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 Datan & 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 Datan & 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 was rolled to the area of Datan 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. Datan and Aviram, 'inspired' by Korach, establish their own 'headquarters' - "Mishkan Korach, Datan, & 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'llo 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, Datan, Aviram, and the 250 men. Read 16:2 carefully! Who are the leaders and famous people - just Korach, Datan, 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 elokei 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 & Pinchus, 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?

5. 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?]

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-l Elo-hei 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 *Posh'ei Yisra'el* (the sinners among Israel) is not considered a fast; the galbanum (*Helb'nah*) which is pungent was included among the spices for the K'toret" (K'reitot 6b) This is where Korach erred - and why the K'toret was the perfect demonstration of Korach's wrong-headed philosophy.

V. THE STRIVING FOR HOLINESS

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

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

Korach's claim of populist sanctity and of an egalitarian Kedushah runs counter to the message of Tzitzit - and to the multiple realities implied by the 'Anan and by the K'toret. While the 'Anan allowed for different versions of Truth, the K'toret allowed for purification of that which was blemished - for an essential striving for purity which had not been realized.

VI. SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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