

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #39, July 5-6, 2024; 29-30 Sivan 5784; Korach; Rosh Hodesh Tammuz Shabbat and Sunday

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

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

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**Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.**

Korach is the final story in the Torah of the doomed generation of the Exodus. As I have mentioned in recent weeks, Miriam's tzaraat at the end of Behaalotecha, the departure of the Meraglim in Shelach, and Korach's rebellion all take place the same week, 22-29 Sivan of the second year after the Exodus, and the stories are closely related.

Miriam complains to Aharon that Moshe is no longer sharing a tent with his wife Tzipporah. Because Moshe must be ready at any time to meet with Hashem, he must be tahor at all times – and therefore cannot engage in marital relations. God is furious with Miriam and immediately strikes her with tzaraat. Miriam must stay outside the camp for a week to do teshuvah, and during that time, the Meraglim leave for a fact finding tour of Canaan, and Korach's group challenges Moshe and Aharon. The week that is now ending is the anniversary of this bitter week in Jewish history.

Miriam's lashon hora comes at an especially difficult time for Moshe. Many of the people grumble about how long it is taking to arrive at the promised land and how the harsh desert seems not to be an improvement on their life in Egypt. Moshe is concerned about the upcoming report of the Meraglim – with good reason. He adds a yud to Hoshea's name so it starts with yud-hey – a reference to Hashem's name – hoping that God will protect Yehoshua on the mission. Korach, some of the leaders of Reuben, and 250 leading men of the generation rebel against Moshe and Aharon. These crises all occur while Miriam, Moshe's mentor for his entire life, is outside the camp in isolation. While Moshe faces one crisis after another, his closest supporter engages in lashon hora against him rather than helping him cope with trouble. Moshe is the humblest person in the Torah, and his sister and close advisor contributes to his low self image rather than helping him cope with his cousin Korach's attacks on the legitimacy of his leadership of B'Nai Yisrael (see Rabbi Eitan Mayer's excellent discussion; shiur attached to email or in my archives).

Korach's complaint, that Moshe and Aharon have taken both the religious and political leadership of B'Nai Yisrael, hurts Moshe personally. Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon to raise up the family of Kehat (of which Korach is the leader) and to give them the most important task of all the families of Levi (other than the Kohanim) – carrying the holy vessels and the Ark when B'Nai Yisrael move. Korach, however, considers all the Jews to be Kadosh (holy). The problem with Korach's desire is that the holy vessels from the Mishkan are dangerous. If a non-Kohen even sees, let alone touches, one of the vessels when it is not covered in techeilet (cloth dyed with the special blue dye), then that person will die immediately.

The holy vessels once dedicated to the Mishkan are part of God's world, and a human cannot survive in God's world unless He invites him. Korach desires something impossible.

The stories of this critical week remind us of incidents earlier in the Torah, and a principle of Torah analysis is that incidents with parallel actions and key words help us understand both events. For example, the cravings of the dissatisfied members of B'Nai Yisrael – those arguing that life in Egypt was better than their life in the Midbar – remind us of Adam and Chava Rishon not being satisfied with food from every plant and tree in Gan Eden, because God forbid them to eat from His one special tree. God presents the people with His special food from heaven (manna) and quail when they want meat – but they complain like Adam and Chava complain about not having access to one tree in Gan Eden. Korach complains about having the most important task of any non-Kohen because he cannot be the Kohen Gadol. Instead of thanking God for what He gives to us out of pure love, Korach and many others of his generation complain because they cannot have more. Oliver Twist in the orphanage wants "more" food – that desire is easy to understand. When the adults of the generation of the Exodus want more than the manna and quail, however, one can understand why God is unhappy. At almost the same time, the Meraglim return, and ten out of twelve of them convince the people not to enter the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors. It is bad enough that the people reject Hashem's special magical food from Shemayim. When they also reject the special land that He promised to our ancestors, that is the end. God orders that everyone in the generation of the Exodus, except Caleb and Yehoshua, will die in the desert, and only their children will survive to live in the land.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander looks to the fire pans that the Korach and his 250 followers bring with incense to the Mishkan. God accepts Aharon's offering, and a fire from heaven consumes the 250 men who bring offerings because they believe that they are just as kadosh as Aharon. God orders Eleazar to take the fire pans and hammer them into bronze sheets to use as a covering for the holy altar (17:1-3). Rabbi Brander reminds us that even tragic events, such as the Hamas terror, can present opportunities for holiness. Since October 7, many of our soldiers and their families have become heroes. Jews in the diaspora have come closer to our fellow Jews in Israel. Many righteous gentiles are supporting Israel. In the face of an explosion of anti-Semitism throughout the world and greatly increased violence from enemy nations, we have also seen evidence of hope for a better future.

This Shabbat brings us the first day of Rosh Hodesh Tammuz. Our family has four significant yahrzeits in little more than a week. On 3 Tammuz, we observe the 30<sup>th</sup> yahrzeit of the Lubavich Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of blessed memory. The next day marks the yahrzeit of Leonid Alper, grandfather of a Russian family we adopted more than thirty years ago, when they came from Kiev to start a new life in America. Four Tammuz is also the fourth yahrzeit of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, a beloved friend and teacher in the Judaic community in Potomac and Rockville for many years. My grandfather, David Fisher, after whom we named our first child, died shortly after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. His yahrzeit is 8 Tammuz. It makes sense to say farewell to the generation of the Exodus in a week when our family observes so many yahrzeits.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, taught me so much about our religion and introduced me to so much analysis of Torah during the nearly 50 years when we were in close contact. The importance of establishing a direct relationship with Hashem and our concern with protecting our people from those who seek to destroy us were both close to his heart. May we, our children, and our grandchildren merit to find outstanding Rebbes to fill this role for each of them.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.**

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

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## **Parshat Korach: Korach's Rebellion and Finding Light in Crisis**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* © 5784 (2024)  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

The Jewish people face a crisis in this week's parsha. After years of Moshe and Aharon leading the people uncontested, Korach and 250 followers call into question the authority of these two leaders and the power structure they've built. In order to demonstrate the Divine approval backing their leadership, Moshe constructs a test, whereby both Aharon and Korach's co-conspirators will offer incense in the Mishkan, and the side with Divine approbation will have their incense accepted. Unsurprisingly, it is Aharon's offering that is accepted by God, while the two hundred and fifty men representing Korach were all consumed by a heavenly fire, leaving nothing behind but the scrap metal of their firepans.

Yet what is most perplexing in the story is what happens to these firepans, used in an act of rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, God's chosen representatives to lead the Jewish people. One would have expected that these firepans would be consumed along with those who used them, or at the very least decommissioned. It is logical to think they should have been destroyed as they were spiritually radioactive. But instead, God commands Moshe to instruct Elazar the Kohen to take these firepans and hammer them into sheets of bronze to be used as plating for the holy altar (Bamidbar 17:1-3). These very firepans that were used in rebellion are now to be used in service of God!

This turn of events contains a powerful message for each and every one of us. First, that every Jew, even those who have rebelled against God and His appointed leaders, is holy. Those 250 men made the most tragic of mistakes in their rebellion against Moshe and Aaron, which at its core was a rebellion against God. Yet they were not fundamentally mistaken in their insistence that "*all the congregation is holy*" (Bemidbar 16:3), and the firepans they used retain a spark of sanctity, requiring that they remain in use in the Mishkan.

Furthermore, this action reminds us as a people that in moments of darkness, in times of crisis, we can find redemption and light. When we go through challenges – including the difficult ordeals we are going through now – we are not to forget and discard them, but to find the light and the redeeming aspects within.

The copper plating of the altar was intended as a "*sign for the Jewish people*" (Bemidbar 17:3) – a sign, the Netziv writes, that even sinfulness, tragedy, and crisis hold within them the opportunity to grow into holiness (Haamek Davar, ad. loc.). As we continue to navigate this ongoing, months-long time of crisis for the Jewish people, we are reminded of the growth

that has emerged from the challenge, and the responsibility to take these difficult moments and to incorporate them into the altar – the ultimate symbol of sacrifice and commitment.

We have lost so many; yet at the same time we have seen the heroism of soldiers and their families, the nobility of our youth, renewed partnership between diaspora Jewry and Israel, and the support of righteous gentiles. We've been able to prioritize between what in life is important and what is trivial.

Through this narrative of Korach and the firepans, God is modeling for all of us how one deals with crisis. Our duty is not to run away, but to find the light in the darkness, and to use that light to live more joyful, productive, and engaging lives.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsny.org) or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

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### **Korach: Worth the Price**

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5779 (2019)

**Moshe sent** to call Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, but they said,

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

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

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

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

It's one of the most well-known notions about our daily behavior at the end of every prayer and Kaddish. While backing up, we say, "*Oseh Shalom Bimromav, HU yaaseh Shalom aleinu v'al KOL YISRAEL... Make peace on high, He will make peace upon us and upon all of Israel.*" By backing up at that time we are demonstrating that behavior that will make more certain that peace will be achieved.

Yielding to others. It's not always a sign of weakness. It is often a symptom of strength.

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

I had two parents in school that were at war with each other, and it even boiled over to the point where I was concerned if they met in hallway together there would be a real explosion. Every good father wants to protect his child. Well one kid came home with magic marker writing all over his blue down winter coat. His father was livid. He called the parents of the child who did the writing demanding an explanation for their child's behavior. The kid claimed that the other boy was bothering him and bullying him, and he felt he had to take a stand. So he colored his coat. The other father didn't want to believe that his kid was capable of such behavior, and he insisted that his kid was being bullied. Then they came to me. I told both parents that I prefer to handle these matters before the parents get involved with each other.

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

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

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-korach/>

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## **Korach – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Cloth Covering on the Shulchan During Keriat HaTorah**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer \*  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

*"And Eleazar the priest took the copper fire-pans, which they that were burnt had offered; and they beat them out for a covering of the altar" (Bamidbar 17:4).*

### **QUESTION – Chicago \*\***

Does a shulchan require a cloth covering for when the Torah is being read? Or can the Torah be read directly on wood?

### **ANSWER**

No, a cover is not strictly needed. The Gemara talks about it being put down directly on a chair or the like. See *Megillah 26b, Shulchan Arukh YD 282:12* (and the Tur/Beit Yosef there).

To clarify, if it is read directly on the wood, then the bimah becomes a tashmish kedushah, not just a tashmish d'tashmish. This is a larger discussion if it was only used *באגראי*.

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTION**

Thank you. It would be for a new, regularly used bimah.

### **ANSWER**

Then that's fine, but just know that it makes the kedushah status of the bimah weightier.

\* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

\* From a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/07/ryrkorach/>

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## Korach's Surprising Legacy

By Rabbi Aaron Finkelstein \*

Growing up, Korach came up twice a year. At summer camp, Korach was a biblical arch villain. Campers and staff would read this parasha and derive lessons about holiness, jealousy and power. During one memorable year, a group of counselors organized an unauthorized staff meeting in an attempt to create a more democratic leadership structure at camp. They were disciplined and explicitly compared to Korach, whose attempts to wrest power from Moshe take center stage in this week's parsha.

However, Korach also came to mind in a context which couldn't have been more different. Every year while standing in shul on Rosh Hashanah, we would introduce the shofar by reciting Psalm 47 seven times:

*For the leader, of the sons of Korach, a psalm. All you peoples, clap your hands, raise a joyous shout for God.*

Reading this Psalm, I always wondered, what was Korach, or his sons at least, doing at the height of Rosh Hashanah davening?!

Based on a verse in Parashat Pinchas, our rabbis and commentators wrought a more nuanced epilogue to the Korach story. A few weeks from now, we will read the second census that takes place in Sefer Bamidbar. As it recapitulates Korach's rebellion, the Torah tells us:

*The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, and Dathan and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen in the assembly, who agitated against Moses and Aaron as part of Korah's band when they agitated against God.*

*The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with Korah—when that band died, when the fire consumed the two hundred and fifty men—and they became an example. The sons of Korah, however, did not die.*

Rashi (citing Sanhedrin 110a) explains:

**"BUT THE SONS OF KORACH DID NOT DIE"** — *They were in the plot originally, but at the moment when the rebellion broke out they had thoughts of repentance in their hearts; therefore a high spot was fenced round for them in Gehinnom and they stayed there.*

In a similar vein, *Bava Batra* 74a describes the journeys of Rabbah bar bar Hana, who is shown various landmarks from biblical times. He comes across two rifts in the ground which are smoking and hears the voices of the sons of Korach. What were they saying? According to the Gemara, they were chanting and repeating the words, "Moshe and his Torah are true."

These rabbinic texts suggest something both profound and unimaginable. Korach's own sons had a change of heart. While they were initially part of the plot against Moshe and Aaron, they changed their minds and thus their lives were spared. Our rabbis' conjuring of them is not totally complimentary to be sure. They are stuck in limbo, in "a high spot of Gehinnom," where they sing about the truth. Still, they contemplated and even began a process of teshuva and for this they were saved.

Eleven Psalms are attributed to Korach's sons, the most prominent of which we recite on Rosh Hashanah. These psalms speak of God's kingship but also contain themes like forgiveness and trusting in God during times of adversity. It makes perfect sense then that we invoke Korach's sons during the yamim noraim, a time when we ourselves are trying to change our own hearts. At the moment when we hear the sound of the shofar, we are trying to have our own moment like Korach's sons, where an alarm bell goes off and we finally turn toward teshuva.

Beyond Rosh Hashanah, Korach's sons teach us that the work of cheshbon hanefesh, our own spiritual accounting, is evergreen. We must seek truth continually, assess and reassess situations, and wonder, as Korach's sons did, if perhaps, there is another way. Such exploration requires a certain spiritual courage, for it may pit us against a larger group like Korach's assembly, elements of our upbringing, or our own long-held beliefs. Surprisingly, Korach's greatest legacy is not his argument with Moshe but what his children learn from the experience. Korach's sons teach us the power of repentance and that ultimately, this kind of soul-searching work is core to our people's survival as well.

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/07/korach5784/>

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## Bernice Angel Schotten: In Memoriam

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

[ed.: My wife and I spent a week in Sioux Falls, SD in June 2019 while our son covered for the nephrologist at the major hospital in the community. I had the privilege of attending Rabbi Mendel Alperowitz's parsha shiur that week and meeting Mrs. Schotten. I learned later that Mrs. Schotten was Rabbi Angel's sister. I am printing this tribute for several reasons – a fine summary of many Jewish mourning practices, a tribute to a very special woman, and an appropriate time since Korach marks the end of the Torah's discussion of the generation of the Exodus (who have just received the news that they are to die in the Midbar without entering the land that Hashem promised to our people).] Rabbi Angel's words:

As we mark the end of the "sheloshim" mourning period for my sister Bernice, here are some words in her memory.

Bernice Angel Schotten passed away unexpectedly at the age of 77. She had been active pretty much until the day she died. She and her late husband Peter lived in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for 50 years, where Peter taught Political Science at Augustana College. After Peter's death a few years ago, Bernice decided to relocate to Brookline, MA, to live closer to her daughter.

Bernice was one of four siblings in our family, the only daughter. Although third-born, she was the first of us to pass away. The mourning symbol of "Keriah" comes to mind. We tear a garment as a sign of grief – but really as a sign of a tear in the fabric of our lives. The deceased has gone on to the world beyond, but the survivors feel the loss. Mourners learn to heal, but the tear leaves a permanent scar.

We grew up together in Seattle with wonderful parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins – a large network of family and friends. From her earliest years, Bernice was bright, energetic, thoughtful, and independent. She attended the Seattle Hebrew Day School, Franklin High School and the University of Washington, and she was a leader and activist in various school clubs and youth groups. She met Peter at U of W. Peter continued his PhD studies in Claremont, Ca., and he and Bernice lived there for a while before moving to Sioux Falls.

Although she lived much of her life far away from us, she maintained ongoing relationships with her siblings and other family members. She remembered birthdays; she loved when family members visited her in Sioux Falls; and she enjoyed traveling to join us for family celebrations and reunions. The last time I saw Bernice in person was in January 2024 when she came from Brookline to attend the wedding of our grandson Max and Rena.

But the Jewish mourning practices go beyond Keriah. Mourners recite Kaddish. Significantly, the Kaddish prayer has nothing whatsoever to do with death. Rather it is a dramatic expression of God's greatness, beyond any words of praise we can possibly utter. In praising God, we are acknowledging our faith in the ultimate wisdom of God's ways. When we tear Keriah, we bless God as the dayan ha-emet, the True Judge. It is a blessing of resignation. We don't understand the mysteries of life and death, the passing of the generations, the ongoing meaning of life in the face of death. But we bow our heads and praise God. At a time when we sense our own mortality and vulnerability, we express trust in the ultimate value of our God-given existence.

When we observe the "shiva" and "sheloshim" mourning periods, we reminisce. We remember the wonderful times – the family celebrations, picnics, vacations, parties of all kinds. Bernice had so much for which to be grateful – and she was truly grateful. When she had to face some difficult times and troubles, she demonstrated an amazing strength of character. In one of my last phone conversations with Bernice, I told her she was gutsy and resilient in adjusting to her new life in Brookline. But she was gutsy and resilient throughout her life.

In her years in Sioux Falls, she was an active leader of the small Jewish community there. She taught in the Sunday School. She was part of an ongoing Torah study group with the Chabad rabbi of Sioux Falls. She was a proud and active Jewish leader...principled, generous, loving, devoted.

Her memory will be a blessing, source of strength and happiness to her daughter, her siblings, her extended family, her many friends in Sioux Falls, Seattle, Brookline and around the country.

*"The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; may the Name of the Lord be blessed."*

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3248>

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## **Does Anyone Hear?: Thoughts for Parashat Korah**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Some years ago, I officiated at a wedding in a very upscale venue. Before the ceremony, I asked the wedding planner to check that the microphone was on. After being assured that everything was in good order, the wedding procession began.

It was a large wedding with many hundreds of guests. The bride and groom and their parents stood under the Huppa with me, and family members sat in the first few rows. I chanted the blessings, delivered an address to the bride and groom, and continued the ceremony until the breaking of the glass. Everything went very well.

Almost everything.

It turned out that the microphone wasn't on after all. Thus, no one other than those under the Huppa and the first row or two of guests heard any of the blessings or my wedding speech.

I was understandably annoyed. I had done my best to do a nice wedding but very few even heard my words.

But then I had a flash of insight! This was a parable of a rabbi's life!!.. We work hard to find the right words, to convey the right message...but only those closest to us even hear us. Most don't hear, don't listen, and don't really care. The "microphone" isn't on, the words don't reach them no matter how hard we try.

But then I realized that the problem doesn't only face rabbis; it faces everyone who has a positive message to convey. It confronts all who speak for righteousness against evil; for truth against falsehood; for Israel against its enemies. Those nearby hear the message but so many beyond our immediate audience don't hear what we are saying.

It can be frustrating. It can cause one to lose heart.

In pondering this dilemma, we can find room for optimism in this week's Torah portion. Parashat Korah actually can be a depressing read: rebellion against Moses and Aaron; discontent among the masses of Israelites; deaths and plagues. Moses must have felt as though he was speaking without a "microphone." Most of the people did not seem to hear his message and did not internalize his teachings.

But remarkably, the Torah notes that the sons of Korah did not perish along with their father and his fellow rebels. Rabbinic tradition has it that the sons repented; they actually listened to Moses' words and realized the truth of his message.

The Talmud teaches that the words of those who have fear of Heaven will ultimately be heard. Kohelet concludes: "*In the end, when all is heard, fear the Lord...*" This is interpreted to mean that even though one's words are not "heard" now, they will be heard in the end...if not by this generation, then by future generations. Righteous words do not die. They take effect even if we don't see results immediately. Although Korah wickedly defied the words of Moses, Korah's sons listened to Moses.

So this is the message: good words ultimately prevail even if so many people don't hear them right now. Truth overcomes falsehood. Love overcomes hatred. Righteousness defeats evil. We may not see immediate results, but we can hope that our words will eventually take root.

Sometimes (often!) we speak but the microphone isn't on. Most people don't hear our words. But we trust that ultimately the words will be transmitted into the back rows, little by little, until they take root in the hearts, minds and souls of the people.

*Sof davar hakol nishma...In the end, the true message of love, peace and faith will be heard.*

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3250>

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## Parshas Korach – The Propaganda War

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May Hashem grant the kidnapped boys a speedy and safe redemption. \*\* May Hashem bless us with safety and peace.

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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

\*\* [ed. note: In 2014, our prayers were for boys kidnapped on Lag B'Omer. In 2024, our prayers are for the hostages in Gaza and victims of terror and anti-Semitism throughout the world. See:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Gush\\_Etzion\\_kidnapping\\_and\\_murder#:~:text=The%20three%20kidnapped%20teenagers%20were,bodies%20found%20on%2030%20June.&text=The%202014%20Gush%20Etzion%20kidnapping,students%20aged%2016%20and%2019.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Gush_Etzion_kidnapping_and_murder#:~:text=The%20three%20kidnapped%20teenagers%20were,bodies%20found%20on%2030%20June.&text=The%202014%20Gush%20Etzion%20kidnapping,students%20aged%2016%20and%2019.)

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives: <https://www.teach613.org/parshas-korach-the-propaganda-war/>

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## **Korach -- The World That Was**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2023

Korach led a massive rebellion against Moshe, challenging Moshe's leadership and his appointment of Aharon as the High Priest. Moshe offers that anyone who thinks he should be the High Priest should try performing the priestly service and bring an incense offering. Tragically, two-hundred and fifty leaders of the nation took up the challenge and offered incense offerings. Hashem ended the rebellion through clear, open miracles. The heads of the rebellion, Korach, Dasan and Aviram, and their families, were swallowed by the earth. A fire came forth from G-d and burned all those who offered the incense to death. (Bamidbar 26:32-35)

Shockingly, the very next day the nation challenges Moshe and Aharon saying, "You killed Hashem's people!" (ibid. 17:6) They had just witnessed open miracles defending Moshe's leadership and his appointment of Aharon as the High Priest. All those who had perished had openly challenged that leadership and sought to take positions Hashem had not given them. How could they possibly blame Moshe and Aharon for those deaths?

The Ramban (ibid.) explains that although they recognized that Aharon was indeed the correct High Priest, they still thought there was merit to the rebellion. They were not yet convinced that Moshe had been correct to appoint the Levi'im to replace the firstborn and thought that the firstborn should be the ones to support the Priests in the Temple. They, therefore, claimed that Moshe was wrong in suggesting that those involved in the rebellion should bring incense offerings. Since these men were not supposed to be priests, they were not allowed to bring offerings. They challenged that Moshe should have suggested that they serve as Levi'im, singing songs of praise, carrying the vessels and parts of the Tabernacle or assisting the priests in some other way. In essence, they were claiming that these men did not die because of the rebellion and were right to rebel against Moshe. They claimed that they only died for going beyond their station and bringing an offering.

The Ramban is telling us that the people believed that the two-hundred and fifty men who were worthy of being appointed as Levi'im to serve in the Temple were burned alive by a fireball from G-d because they brought a sacrifice. Is bringing a sacrifice so terrible that it would warrant death through such an open miracle?

Perhaps the answer can be found in the aftermath of this challenge. A plague began sweeping through the nation. Moshe sent Aharon with the incense offering to stop the plague. Rash"i (Bamidbar 17:13) tells us that through the offering Aharon was able to force the Angel of Death to stop in his tracks. The Angel of Death challenged Aharon to let him continue as he was following G-d's orders, but despite his protests, he could not act. The incense offering creates an impact in the spiritual realm which even the Angel of Death can't override.

When the two-hundred and fifty men chose to offer an incense offering incorrectly, they were creating dangerous and inappropriate spiritual forces. Who knows what impact those forces may have had on the world?

This Shabbat we begin the Hebrew month of Tammuz. In two weeks we will observe the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which marks the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem and begins the Three Weeks of Mourning focusing on the loss of the Temple. After two thousand years, it is difficult for us to understand what we lost, let alone to feel any sense of mourning for that loss. If we consider the claim of the nation and Aharon's actions, it can give us an insight into what we have lost.

The sacrifices brought in the Temple had spiritual implications we can't even begin to understand. One sacrifice brought properly by Aharon overpowered the Angel of Death. Every day numerous sacrifices were brought in the Temple properly, creating powerful spiritual forces on behalf of our people and the world at large. Who knows what impact those sacrifices had? How many wars, diseases and natural disasters were prevented? How many lives were extended and how much wealth, joy and blessing were granted? Who knows what our lives would be like if we still had those opportunities?

\* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

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### **Korach**

by Rabbi Herzl Heftor \*

]Rabbi Heftor did not send in a Dvar Torah for Korach. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah[

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftor is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://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.

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### **Korach -- Beware of Hypocrites**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Talmud )Sotah 22:2( records, in that vein, an advice given by King Yannai )127-76 BCE( to his wife: *Do not fear the pious or the non-pious, but rather the hypocrites who pretend to be pious.*

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

Shabbat Shalom

**Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.**

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### **Korach: Learning from our Ancestors**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Our portion tells the tale of the ill fated rebellion against Moshe in the desert. His cousin Korach, although already a wealthy and high-ranking Levite, sought Moshe's post as leader and stoked fear and resentment among the people. Moshe tried to resolve the challenge diplomatically, but Korach refused. Moshe then challenges Korach and his followers to bring incense offerings to God, an offering reserved for the priests, if they believe themselves to be so special. Korach agrees, but when they bring their offerings, the earth splits open and swallows up Korach and his followers. However, Korach's children were spared, because they did not join their father.

There are two lessons to learn from this story.

The first )and perhaps most important( is that we must always be nice to our rabbis and spiritual leaders when their name is Moshe.

The second though is that there will come a time when our children will grow up and make decisions that may be at odds with our desires. They may even look at what we do and say, "Dear parents. We think you're going down a bad path and we cannot be a part of it." Now children are not automatically right just because they're younger, but they do have a perspective where they can see mistakes their parents or ancestors have made and try not to repeat them. Children of imperfect parents can become better adults, like the sons of Korach.

We should hope and pray that our children receive the wisdom they need to look at the traditions and lives of their forebears and repeat the good things while filtering out the mistakes that we may have made in our own lives. In this way, our children have the seeds of salvation for themselves and our people. May we also recognise that we are children of parents too and pray for the wisdom we need to learn both from the mistakes and the successes of our ancestors.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the family of Vernon Levy. Vernon was a tremendous part of the Jewish community here in Auckland for his entire life and a wonderful man worthy of emulation. We will miss him and know that his memory will inspire us.

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

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### **Rav Kook Torah Korach: Endless Blessing**

Korach, with his motto, "*All the people in the community are holy*" )Num. 16:3(, contested the idea of a select group dedicated to serving God. After the rebellion was put down — quite literally, as it turned out — God affirmed the nation's need for Levites and kohanim to serve in the Temple and instruct the people.

#### **Twenty-Four Matnot Kehunah**

Since the tribe of Levi was dedicated to fostering the spiritual aspirations of the Jewish people, they were not meant to spend their days working the land. Instead, they were supported through a system of terumot and ma'aserot )tithes(. For this reason, the story of Korach's rebellion is followed by a detailed description of the twenty-four matnot kehunah, gifts bestowed to the kohanim.

Not all people, however, are equally enthusiastic about giving these gifts.

Our eagerness to perform a mitzvah depends on how well we comprehend its goal and purpose. If the objective of a mitzvah is not clearly understood, then its fulfillment will suffer from a lethargic, lackadaisical attitude.

The institution of kehunah, the priesthood, and the various methods of supporting it, will be better appreciated when the entire nation is on a high spiritual level. Only then will we truly recognize the benefit of their influence. And we will realize that our lives are blessed to the extent that we are connected to the spiritual life of the nation.

We may discern three attitudes toward matnot kehunah:

#### **1. Refusal to Tithe**

The lowest level is one of outright refusal to support the kohanim. This attitude stems from a spiritual crisis in which one fails to appreciate the benefit of a spiritual life in general, and the positive influence of the kohanim, knowledgeable in

God's Torah, in particular. Such a person lacks a connection to the special covenant of the kehunah and its overall goal, which encompasses all generations of the Jewish people, past, present, and future. This is a terrible tragedy, the result of a profound emptiness and estrangement from Torah.

## **2. Fulfilling the Letter of the Law**

The second attitude is one of disinterest, even neglect. At this level, appreciation for the institution of kehunah is limited to its future place in the lofty state promised to the Jewish people. Since we have not yet merited this long-awaited state, the resulting attitude is to observe the bare minimum, fulfilling only the letter of the law so as not to violate any legal obligations. Such an individual will seek loopholes to avoid tithing, like bringing produce into the house via the roof or the courtyard )see Berachot 35b(.

While this outlook is not so callous that it reflects a life tragically distant from Torah, it is still very far from a life of blessing. These individuals have not clarified for themselves the purpose of life. They do not appreciate the true value of eternal goals. They fail to grasp how these goals transcend any particular time, how they form a collective activity composed of the combined service of many generations — beautiful structures built through continuous efforts of Torah and mitzvot over time.

Sadly, with such an attitude, life appears as something that must be accepted against our will. Life's greatness and vitality, its essential holiness and beauty, are hidden. As long as one's outlook is so limited, life offers little satisfaction, and the soul will not be content with any of its accomplishments. What good is material success, when life's inner content is empty, incapable of nourishing our higher feelings and thoughts?

## **3. The Broad Outlook**

The highest level is when one acquires the broader outlook that encompasses the overall expanse of life, embracing all generations and all times. From this viewpoint, the current state of the institution of kehunah is not the decisive factor. The kehunah is respected and cherished due to its future greatness, and from the overall good that comes from the accumulation of all of its contributions in the past, present, and future.

With such an outlook, the nation is ready to receive a profusion of blessings, both spiritual and material. It is with regard to this approach toward tithing that it is written:

*"Bring all the tithes to the storehouse, so that there is food in My house. Test Me in this, says the Lord of hosts: if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven, and pour out to you blessing ad bli dai — until there is more than enough." )Malachi 3:10(*

The blessing is extraordinary, encompassing all of life's material aspects. But its source is the collective blessing that revitalizes life's inner depths: the blessing of inner peace, enabling us to feel the goodness of life itself. Life is not limited to the flawed present. As a result, nothing is lacking, and we receive unlimited blessings — "ad bli dai." As the Sages interpreted homiletically: *"Until one's lips are exhausted from protesting: 'Enough!'" )Shabbat 32b(*

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. III, pp. 183-184.(

[https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORACH\\_65.htm](https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORACH_65.htm)

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## **Korach: When Truth is Sacrificed to Power (5775, 5782)**

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

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

principled.

*“You have gone too far,”* they said to Moses and Aaron. *“All of the community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s people?”*  
Num. 16:3–4

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

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

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

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

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

*“Is it not enough that you have brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you insist on lording it over us! What is more: you have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you think that you can pull something over our eyes? We will not come up!”* Num. 16:13–14

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

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

*“Any dispute for the sake of Heaven will have enduring value, but every dispute not for the sake of Heaven will not have enduring value. What is an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of one not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company.”* Mishnah Avot 5:21

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

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

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

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

The next day the entire Israelite community complained to Moses and Aaron, “*You have killed the Lord’s people!*”  
Num. 17:6

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

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

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

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

All this is very sad indeed, since it is opposed to the fundamental principle of the university as a home for the collaborative search for truth. It also does little for the cause of peace in the Middle East, for the future of the Palestinians, or for

freedom, democracy, religious liberty, and human rights. There are real and substantive issues at stake, which need to be faced by both sides with honesty and courage. Nothing is achieved by sacrificing truth to the pursuit of power - the way of Korach through the ages.

#### **FOOTNOTE:**

]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.

#### **Around the Shabbat Table:**

]1[ Do you think Korach's original claim had merit?

]2[ What eventually resolved the leadership dispute raised by Korach and the other rebels?

]3[ How do you imagine a place of learning such as a university can best function as a "home for the collaborative search for truth"?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/when-truth-is-sacrificed-to-power/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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### **Korach: Embracing Our Unique Roles -- Life Lessons From the Parshah**

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l \* © Chabad 2024

#### **The Great Rebellion**

This week's Torah portion tells the tragic story of the great rebellion led by Moses' cousin Korach.

Like Moses and Aaron, Korach was a great-grandson of Levi, and his rebellion was, sadly, rooted in jealousy. *"Why are my cousins Moses and Aaron the leaders?!"* thought Korach. *"Why not me?"*

So, along with his two sons, Korach riled up the notorious Dathan and Abiram, On the son of Peleth, and 250 additional members of the neighboring tribe of Reuben. Backed by this rebellious group, Korach confronted Moses and challenged his leadership, accusing him of unfairly taking the top leadership positions — king and High Priest — for himself and his brother Aaron.

Moses proposed a test to determine who was truly worthy of leadership: let everyone bring an incense offering to the Tabernacle and let G d reveal His choice for High Priest.

He tried to placate the rebellious group, but they continued their mutiny, growing and expanding their ranks.

So he asked G d to make Korach's punishment unique and unforgettable, which reminds me of a story I heard as a young child: Three men committed a crime that was punishable by death. They went before the king and were condemned to die. The king, however, wanting to show his benevolence, let them each choose the manner of their execution.

The first man chose to die by sword, as it was the quickest. The second man chose to die by fire, the most romantic option.

"And how would you like to die?" the king's executioner asked the third man.

“From old age!”

Moses argued that if Korach and his minions died of old age, it would signal that he, Moses, had acted of his own accord. If their deaths were unusual, however, everyone would know that he had acted only on behalf of G d.

Incredibly, the earth opened up and swallowed Korach and his family, and a Heavenly fire consumed the other rebels.

The next day, the people complained that Moses and Aaron were to blame for these deaths. G d, understandably angered, sent a plague that killed thousands. Moses instructed Aaron to quickly take a firepan with incense, go into the midst of the congregation, and atone for their sins. Aaron did so, standing *“Between the living and the dead,”*<sup>1</sup> and the plague was halted.

### **Take What?**

The parshah opens with the verse, *“Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kehath, the son of Levi took, along with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, descendants of Reuben.”*<sup>2</sup>

What exactly did Korach “take”?

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that he “took” the people with his words, persuading them to join his uprising.

But primarily, says Rashi, what Korach took was himself: *“He took himself to one side to dissociate himself from the congregation, to contest the appointment of Aaron to the position of High Priest ... He separated himself from the congregation to persist in a dispute.”*

Jealousy can kill. And in this state, Korach cut himself off from the Jewish people, “taking” himself away, ultimately never to return.

### **We Must All Play Our Part**

Korach’s claim seemed noble: *“There’s nothing special about you, Moses. We all — the entire nation — heard G d speak at Mount Sinai. We are all on the same lofty level of holiness! You have appointed Aaron and yourself leaders, but we are all leaders!”*

Korach wanted everyone to have equal roles. The absence of an obvious leader creates anarchy. Every person has a distinct role. The Kohen has his role, the Levite has his, and the Israelite has his.

Korach’s assertion that all Jews are holy was correct; his mistake was trying to take away our individuality. Every person has their own unique abilities, strengths, and talents, and it is only when we each play our part and do our jobs that we can properly serve G d together.

Each person must do what G d expects specifically from him or her. Some mitzvot can only be done by a Kohen, some by a Levite, some by a king, and some by farmers. Some are meant to be done by men, and some by women.

This doesn’t sound very democratic! We cannot serve in the Tabernacle just because we are not all priests?

Exactly right, explained the Rebbe. We are all holy, but we are not all the same. We are all unique, and we complement each other. Nobody is here by accident. We all are created by G d through His Divine design, and we must celebrate and maximize our individual strengths and talents.<sup>3</sup>

### **Marriage, The Great Partnership**

One of the greatest mitzvot — part of the Rebbe's 10-Point Mitzvah Campaign — is lighting Shabbat candles. It has its origins in rabbinic teachings and has become a hallmark of Judaism. Who lights Shabbat candles? Women and girls. Traditionally, when a girl turns three years old, she starts lighting Shabbat candles.

**The question arises: if it's such a tremendous mitzvah, why doesn't a man light Shabbat candles? The answer, based on a fantastic teaching in Kabbalah, is that he does. How? Because his wife does it for him. What if he's not married? It doesn't matter. His wife is still doing it for him. He just doesn't know who she is yet.**<sup>4</sup> [emphasis added]

In the same vein, every Friday night we recite Kiddush — sanctifying Shabbat with a blessing made over a cup of wine. This is a very important mitzvah. And, by and large, Kiddush is said by men. Why is it not said by women? Because men say Kiddush on behalf of women.

)Note that men need to have candles lit where they live, and men who live alone should light candles. Similarly, women must make Kiddush or hear it from someone — even if not her husband.(

Men do mitzvot for women, and women do mitzvot for men. Kings do mitzvot for farmers, and farmers do mitzvot for kings. The Kohen and Levite do mitzvot for the Israelite, and we all do mitzvot for each other. This is G d's master creation plan, in which we all play a distinct role.

### **A Spouse's Gift of Life**

At the outset, the verse states that Korach began his rebellion with Dathan and Abiram, On the son of Peleth, and 250 others from the tribe of Reuben. Yet when the rebels actually confronted Moses, On's name suddenly disappeared. Where did he go?

The Talmud<sup>5</sup> explains that bold actions on the part of On's wife saved his life.

When Mrs. Peleth heard about her husband's participation in the rebellion, she reasoned with him, *"What could you possibly gain? You are from the tribe of Reuben. This is a dispute between the Levites. Why do you have to involve yourself in an argument that's not yours?"*

On said, *"But I'm already committed! What should I do?"*

So his wife said, *"Leave it to me."* She gave him enough wine to fall into a very deep sleep, and then she sat at the entrance of their tent, her hair blatantly uncovered. *"These people may be rebellious,"* she reasoned, *"but they still respect the laws of modesty, and no man will allow himself to see a married woman's hair."*

Her plan worked. Any member of Korach's team who approached their tent to collect On encountered Mrs. Peleth sitting there brushing her hair and quickly turned away.

By the time On woke up, it was all over. This teaches us that a wise woman can literally save her husband's life!

### **A Neighbor's Impact**

At first glance, Dathan and Abiram's partnership with Korach seems strange. Korach was from the tribe of Levi and they were members of the tribe of Reuben. How did they get involved with one another?

The tribes camped in the desert in a very specific formation, with three tribes on each side of the Tabernacle. The families of Levi surrounded the Tabernacle, with Moses' and Aaron's families to the East, Kehot to the south, Gershon to the west, and Merari to the north. The three tribes camped to the south were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad.

Thus, Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben were neighbors with Korach and the family of Kehot. With their backyards adjacent to one another, they would hang out at each other's barbecues.

*"Woe to the wicked, and woe to his neighbor!"*<sup>6</sup> declares the Mishnah. Neighbors can influence each other, so we must be very careful where we choose to live. Our children will spend a lot of time with the neighborhood kids, and their closeness will certainly have an impact on them.

The Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers instructs: *"Distance yourself from a bad neighbor."*<sup>7</sup> The tribe of Reuben did not distance themselves from Korach, and some of them paid for this mistake with their very lives.

### **The Secret of Incense**

When a plague broke out in response to the people's complaint that the rebels had been killed, Moses instructed Aaron to take incense — ketoret — and bring it to the congregation's midst to atone for them. When Aaron did this, the plague ended.

In the teachings of Chassidism, which are based on Kabbalah, we find that one reason incense is such a powerful tool is that it is connected to one's sense of smell.<sup>8</sup>

When a person faints, we first try to revive them by calling their name. This is effective because one's name relates to one's very essence. If that doesn't work, we take smelling salts or incense and put them under the fainted person's nose. Why? Smell is a powerful channel to the essence of the soul.

Spiritually, the incense reaching the person's core demonstrates that even though a person may sin, the essence of their soul always remains pure.

Where did Moses learn the secret of incense and its ability to stop a plague? The Talmud<sup>9</sup> relates that when he ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, the angels presented him with gifts. The Angel of Death presented him with the secret connection between incense and stopping a plague.

Ironically, Aaron the High Priest, while having his very role challenged, ran into the crowd with the incense to carry out his role!

The High Priest's privilege and mission is to intercede and help save the Jewish people. Aaron's role is to use incense to atone for the Jews' sins. The High Priest brought incense to atone for the people every Yom Kippur — the holiest service of the holiest day — and would do the same thing any other time there was a need for atonement. That's leadership. And that's Aaron sticking to his role and contributing his unique part to the master plan.

We all have our distinct roles to play in His master plan. Without looking at others and coveting their roles, we must fulfill our respective missions to the best of our abilities.

May we merit to see our righteous Moshiach fulfilling his role — ushering in the Ultimate Redemption—and may it speedily in our days. Amen.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Numbers 17:13.
2. Numbers 16:1.
3. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol 18, pg 203.

4. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol 11, pg 289.
5. *Sanhedrin* 109b-110a.
6. *Negaim*, ch. 12.
7. *Avot* 1:7.
8. See *Chassidic Discourse Ki Tisa*, 5728.
9. *Shabbat* 89a

\* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

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## **Korach: A Dash of Salt**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky \*

### **A Dash of Salt**

After Korach's rebellion was crushed, the people finally accepted the Divinely ordained distinction between the tribe of Levi and the lay people. G-d confirmed this distinction by listing the entitlements that the people were to give the priests and Levites.

*I have given all the separated portions of the sanctified animals that the Israelites set aside for G-d to you ]Aaron[ and your sons and daughters with you, as an eternal portion. It is an eternal covenant of salt before G-d for you and your descendants with you. )Num. 18:19(*

The Torah's outer dimension is the knowledge of how G-d wants us to live our lives in the context of our physical world. This knowledge is contained in the Talmud and its associated legal texts.

The Torah's inner dimension is the knowledge of the inner life of the soul and its spiritual relationship to G-d; this knowledge is contained in the texts of Jewish mysticism )Kabbalah( and in the vast corpus of Chasidic teachings.

Allegorically, the Torah's outer dimension is compared to bread and meat, the staples of a healthy diet, since we must study this dimension of the Torah in order to lead a healthy spiritual life.

In contrast, the inner dimension of the Torah is compared to salt, which enhances the taste of the food it touches. Including the study of the inner dimension of the Torah in our spiritual "diet" reveals the intrinsic sweetness of the Torah's outer dimension.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

**May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.**

Gut Shabbos,

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#### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

#### Hierarchy and Politics: The Never-Ending Story

It was a classic struggle for power. The only thing that made it different from the usual dramas of royal courts, parliamentary meetings, or corridors of power was that it took place in Burgers' Zoo in Arnhem, Holland, and the key characters were male chimpanzees.

Frans de Waal's study, *Chimpanzee Politics*,<sup>[1]</sup> has rightly become a classic. In it he describes how the alpha male, Yeroen, having been the dominant force for some time, found himself increasingly challenged by a young pretender, Luit. Luit could not depose Yeroen on his own, so he formed an alliance with another young contender, Nikkie. Eventually Luit succeeded and Yeroen was deposed.

Luit was good at his job. He was skilled at peacekeeping within the group. He stood up for the underdog and as a result was widely respected. The females recognised his leadership qualities and were always ready to groom him and let him play with their children. Yeroen had nothing to gain by opposing him. He was already too old to become alpha male again. Nonetheless, Yeroen decided to join forces with the young Nikkie. One night they caught Luit unawares and killed him. The deposed alpha male had his revenge.

Reading this, I thought of the story of Hillel in *Pirkei Avot* (2:6): "He saw a skull floating upon the water, and said: Because you drowned others, you were drowned; and those who drowned you, will themselves be drowned."

In fact, so humanlike were power struggles among the chimpanzees that in 1995, Newt Gingrich, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, included de Waal's work among the twenty-five books he recommended young congressional Republicans to read.<sup>[2]</sup>

Korach was a graduate of the same Machiavellian school of politics. He understood the three ground rules. First you have to be a populist. Play on people's discontents and make it seem as if you are on their side against the current leader. "You have gone too far!" he said to Moses and Aaron. "The whole community is holy, every one of

them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Num. 16:3).

Second, assemble allies. Korach himself was a Levite. His grievance was that Moses had appointed his brother Aaron as High Priest. Evidently he felt that as Moses' cousin – he was the son of Yitzhar, brother of Moses' and Aaron's father Amram – the position should have gone to him. He thought it unfair that both leadership roles should have gone to a single family within the clan.

Korach could hardly expect much support from within his own tribe. The other Levites had nothing to gain by deposing Aaron. Instead he found allies among two other disaffected groups: the Reubenites, Dathan and Aviram, and "250 Israelites who were men of rank within the community, representatives at the assembly, and famous" (v. 2). The Reubenites were aggrieved that as descendants of Jacob's firstborn, they had no special leadership roles. According to Ibn Ezra, the 250 "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.

The revolt was bound to ultimately fail since their grievances were different and could not all be satisfied. But that has never stopped unholy alliances. People with a grudge are more intent on deposing the current leader than on any constructive plan of action of their own. "Hate defeats rationality," said the Sages.<sup>[3]</sup> Injured pride, the feeling that honour should have gone to you, not him, has led to destructive and self-destructive action for as long as humans have existed on earth.

Third, choose the moment when the person you seek to depose is vulnerable. Ramban notes that the Korach revolt took place immediately after the episode of the spies and the ensuing verdict that the people would not enter the land until the next generation. So long as the Israelites - whatever their complaints - felt that they were moving toward their destination, there was no realistic chance of rousing the people in revolt. Only when they realised that they would not live to cross the Jordan was rebellion possible. The people seemingly had nothing to lose.

The comparison between human and chimpanzee politics is not meant lightly. Judaism has long understood that Homo sapiens is a mix of what the Zohar calls nefesh habehamit and nefesh haElokit, the animal soul and the Godly soul. We are not disembodied minds. We have physical desires and these are encoded in our genes. Scientists

speak today about three systems: the "reptile" brain that produces the most primal fight-or-flight responses, the "monkey" brain that is social, emotional, and sensitive to hierarchy, and the human brain, the prefrontal cortex, that is slow, reflective and capable of thinking through consequences of alternative courses of action. This confirms what Jews and others – Plato and Aristotle among them – have long known. It is in the tension and interplay between these systems that the drama of human freedom is played out.

In his most recent book, Frans de Waal notes that "among chimpanzees, hierarchy permeates everything." Among the females this is taken for granted and does not lead to conflict. But among males, "power is always up for grabs." It "has to be fought for and jealously guarded against contenders." Male chimpanzees are "schmoozing and scheming Machiavellians."<sup>[4]</sup> The question is: Are we?

This is not a minor question. It may even be the most important of all if humanity is to have a future. Anthropologists are generally agreed that the earliest humans, the hunter-gatherers, were generally egalitarian. Everyone had their part to play in the group. Their main tasks were to stay alive, find food, and avoid predators. There was no such thing as accumulated wealth. It was only with the development of agriculture, cities, and trade that hierarchy came to dominate human societies. There was usually an absolute leader, a governing (literate) class, and the masses, used as labour in monumental building schemes and as troops for the imperial army. Judaism enters the world as a protest against this kind of structure.

We see this in the opening chapter of the Torah in which God creates the human person in His image and likeness, meaning that we are all equally fragments of the Divine. Why, asked the Sages, was man created singly? "So that no one could say: My ancestors were greater than yours" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). Something of this egalitarianism can be heard in Moses' remark to Joshua, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that He would rest his spirit on them" (Num. 11:29).

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However, like many of the Torah's ideals – among them vegetarianism, the abolition of slavery, and the institution of monogamy – egalitarianism could not happen overnight. It would take centuries, millennia, and in many respects has not yet been fully achieved.

There were two hierarchical structures in biblical Israel. There were kings and there were priests, among them the High Priest. Both were introduced after a crisis: monarchy after the failure of the rule of the “judges”, the Levitical and Aaronide priesthood after the sin of the Golden Calf. Both led, inevitably, to tension and division.

Biblical Israel survived as a united kingdom[5] for only three generations of kings and then split in two. The priesthood became a major source of division in the late Second Temple period, leading to sectarian divisions between Sadducees, Boethusians, and the rest. The story of Korach explains why. Where there is hierarchy, there will be competition as to who is the alpha male.

Is hierarchy an inevitable feature of all advanced civilisations? Maimonides seems to say yes. For him, monarchy was a positive institution, not a mere concession. Abarbanel seems to say no. There are passages in his writings that suggest he was a utopian anarchist who believed that in an ideal world no one would rule over anyone. We would each acknowledge only the sovereignty of God.

Putting together the story of Korach and Frans de Waal's chimpanzee version of House of Cards,[6] the conclusion seems to follow that where there is hierarchy, there will be struggles to be alpha male. The result is what Thomas Hobbes called “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”[7]

That is why the rabbis focused their attention not on the hierarchical crowns of kingship or priesthood but on the non-hierarchical crown of Torah, which is open to all who seek it. Here competition leads not to conflict but to an increase of wisdom,[8] and where Heaven itself, seeing Sages disagree, says, “These and those are the words of the living God.”[9]

The Korach story repeats itself in every generation. The antidote is daily immersion in the alternative world of Torah study that seeks truth not power, and values all equally as voices in a sacred conversation.

[1] Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics*, London, Cape, 1982.

[2] This essay was written in the days following the Brexit vote in Britain, when a struggle was taking place over the leadership of both main political parties. I leave it to the reader to draw any comparisons, either with primate politics or the story of Korach.

[3] Bereishit Rabbah 55:8.

[4] Frans de Waal, *Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?* New York, Norton, 2016, 168.

- [5] Following the Brexit vote, the question is being asked in Britain as to whether the United Kingdom will remain a united kingdom.
- [6] Michael Dobbs, *House of Cards* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).
- [7] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), pt. 1, ch. 11.
- [8] Baba Batra 21a.
- [9] Meaning, both views are correct, see *Eruvin* 13b; *Gittin* 6b.

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“And Korah, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi took Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav... and they rose up in confrontation before Moses...” (Numbers 16:1, 2)

Why didn't the Israelites rise up against the rebels who dared to defy Moses, the selfless man of God who gave up a luxurious and carefree life as Prince of Egypt in order to liberate an enslaved people from tyranny?

Reading between the lines of this amazing story, we discern two distinct ideological positions and political platforms, which between them represented the majority of Hebrews. Both these positions were antithetical to everything that Moses stood for, and the adumbrations of the Korah Wars are still to be heard today, thousands of years later, festering at the very heart of Israeli society.

Before we analyze the exact nature of Korah's rebellion, two factors should be kept in mind. First, the commandment to wear ritual fringes on four-cornered garments (tzitzit), which closed last week's portion of Shelah, serves as an excellent introduction to and eventual rebuttal of the movements that Korah, and Datan and Aviram, represent.

Secondly, Moses' announcement that the entire generation, with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, was condemned to die in the desert (Numbers 14:26-39) made the Hebrews ripe for rebellion.

Moses attempts to deal with Korah, and then with Datan and Aviram separately. This is not only to “divide and conquer”, but rather the Torah's way to emphasize how they represent different approaches in their opposition; different “political parties,” as it were.

Korah, called by the Kotzker Rebbe “the holy grandfather”, uses the democratic argument of “equality in holiness” against Moses and Aaron: “It has been enough leadership for you, all the people in the witness-community are holy with the Lord in their midst. Why must you set yourselves up to be on a higher plane than the congregation of the Lord?” (Numbers 16:3).

And if Korah sees no differences in holiness between different people, and rejects the unique status of Aaron and his sons as Kohanim, it stands to reason that he would also deny any distinction in holiness between different lands, refusing to recognize the

### Likutei Divrei Torah

special sanctity of the Land of Israel. After all, the Revelation at Sinai took place in the desert, outside the geographic boundaries of the land of Israel. If God is within all of us and the entire nation heard the Revelation – then the Lord of the cosmos is certainly within the desert, the very place where that Revelation took place.

Korah's position rejects the Aaronic priesthood as well as the idea that the entire “desert-generation” must be punished for their refusal to conquer the Land of Israel. From Korah's point of view, these are false claims instituted by Moses rather than reflections of the true will and word of God (see Moses' defense of himself: 16:28).

Moreover, Korah justifies the Israelites' desire to remain in the desert precisely because of the desert's holiness, an ideal and idyllic setting for living their lives. For Korah and his sympathizers, the desert is not the place of punishment, but a perfect and perennial Kollel institute of higher learning. God is their Rosh Yeshiva, communicating the “shiur” material to Moses. God also provides the daily portions of manna sufficient for their nutritional needs, He determines when the camp will travel and protects the people from the physical elements with His special “clouds of glory”.

Why leave this ethereal, spiritual haven for the wars, political arguments, economic crises and social challenges necessary to establish a nation state? For reasons of “frumkeit” (religiosity) alone, Korah argues that the Israelites are better off remaining in the desert-Kollel, freed from all decision-making and responsibility.

Moses is willing to call Korah's bluff. He instructs him to take his entire party of 250 men the next day and to provide each of them with a fire-pan and incense for a special “priestly” offering to see whose offering would be acceptable to God. The Divine decision was not long in coming: “A fire came down from God and it consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense” including Korah himself! (16:25, Ibn Ezra ad loc)

Even if Korah's quest for “desert- Kollel sanctity” had been sincere, it did not reflect God's mission for Israel. God wants us to establish a nation-state and to take responsibility to perfect an imperfect world, with all of the challenges that entails. This is the message of the ritual fringes: the white strings represent the white wool of the sheep, the animalistic aspect of our lives and our world. These must be sanctified by the sky-blue color of t'chelet, the symbol of the Divine seen by the elders at the time of the Revelation at Sinai (Exodus 24:10). When we gaze upon the ritual fringes, we must remember our true mission: to enter history, to risk impurity by taking up the challenges of the real world, and to assume our responsibility to become a “sacred nation and kingdom of Priest-

Teachers" to the world (Exodus 19:6 S'forno ad loc).

Datan and Aviram had a different political agenda. They refused to attend a meeting with the greatest prophet and the most successful liberator in history, claiming: "Isn't it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, only to kill us off in the desert? With what right do you rule, yes rule, over us?!" (Numbers 16:13) The Midrash identifies them with the old enemies of Moses from the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the "fighting Israelites" who questioned Moses' right to kill the Egyptian taskmaster. They never wanted to leave Egypt in the first place, but unlike Korah, the last thing they want is to remain behind in the desert. They hanker after the "flesh pots" of Egypt. They would love to assimilate into the "Big Apple." They remember the "... fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic" of Egypt and they believe that this desert fiasco justifies their earlier opposition. They are certain that if they could only return to Egypt and forget their Biblical traditions and values; they would be accepted as Egyptians and benefit from the material advantages of the most powerful country in the world.

They too are punished by God, who causes the earth for which their materialistic spirits yearned so mightily, to swallow them up alive (Numbers 16:35 Ibn Ezra ad loc). Because of their passion for physical pleasures, they never learn to look properly upon the t'chelet of the ritual fringes. They saw neither the royal blue of their majestic ancestry – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, passionate followers of God and lovers of the Land of Israel- nor the sapphire blue of the Divine presence in the world summoning us to His service.

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

##### **Better They Learn from Me...**

Conflict resolution is one of the most important tasks in human relations at every level. Open up any newspaper, and you will read of schoolchildren bullying each other, of married couples who are in bitter conflict, of political parties enmeshed in verbal warfare, and of nations literally at war. What are some of the strategies available to foster conflict resolution?

One of the most interesting strategies can be found in an ancient endeavor known by the generic term of martial arts. I once watched a brief film on the subject in which I observed a fascinating technique. The participant in the battle was instructed not to fight his opponent head on, not to counter aggression with aggression. Rather, he was instructed to yield to the attack, to move paradoxically backwards as if to surrender, and not to move forward in the attack mode. In a sense, he was directed to surprise his opponent by reacting unpredictably. This strategy can be applied to

many situations in life in which there is strife and discord.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Korach, we read of such discord. We study the story of the rebellion led by Korach and his cohorts against Moses. Among this band are Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliav, who have long been thorns in Moses' side. They challenge his authority and threaten outright revolt against his leadership. A civil war looms.

Interestingly, Moses' initial response is not one of anger. He tries verbal persuasion, he calls for Divine intervention, and only then does he eventually indignantly express his anger. But before he reaches that point, he tries something which goes almost unnoticed by most commentators.

He sends for them. He adopts a conciliatory attitude, and invites them into dialogue. "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram..." (Numbers 16:12)

Moses does not "come out fighting," at least not until his invitation to discussion and perhaps even compromise is rebuffed. "...And they said, 'We will not come up...Do you need to make yourself a prince over us?...Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!'"

Only after his attempt at conflict resolution does Moses become angry and does he appeal for Divine intervention. But first he signals his readiness to talk things over.

I have been reading a biography of a great Hasidic leader in early 20th century Poland. His name was Rabbi Israel Danziger, known today by the title of his book of inspirational homilies, *Yismach Yisrael*. He was the heir to the leadership of the second largest Hasidic sect in pre-World War II Europe. That sect was known by the name of the town near Lodz where he and his father before him held court. His father's name was Rabbi Yechiel Danziger, and the name of the town was Alexandrow.

The biography contains documentation of several talks Rabbi Israel gave describing many of the lessons he learned from his sainted father. In one of those talks, he tells of the time that he was sent along with several of his father's emissaries to visit the court of another Hasidic Rebbe. He describes how that Rebbe's personal secretary made the delegation wait their turn on a long line. He describes how when they finally got into the Rebbe's reception room, they were treated perfunctorily, if not coldly. And the request that they were instructed to make of this Rebbe was callously rejected by him. They returned to Alexandrow feeling chastised. Rabbi Israel, who led the delegation, reported back to his father and relayed to him every detail of his disappointing experience.

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About a year later, the other Hasidic Rebbe needed a great favor of Rabbi Yechiel. He sent a delegation to Alexandrow, headed by his own son. The delegation arrived, and much to Rabbi Israel's surprise, his father issued orders that they be welcomed warmly and be shown gracious hospitality. Rabbi Yechiel further instructed that the delegation be given an appointment during "prime time" and not be asked to wait on line at all. Rabbi Yechiel himself waited at his door for them, ushered them in to his private chambers, seated them comfortably, and personally served them refreshments. He listened to their request for a favor of him and granted it generously. Then, as Jewish tradition prescribes, he bid them farewell only after first escorting them part of the way along the route of their return journey.

In his narrative, as recorded in this fascinating biography, Rabbi Israel expresses amazement at his father's conduct. He describes how he approached his father and asked him directly, "Why did you treat them so well? Did you not recall how that Rebbe and his followers treated us not so long ago? Did you have to give them such an effusive welcome after they embarrassed us so much?"

I found Rabbi Yechiel's response, in Yiddish of course, so impressive that I committed it to memory verbatim. He said, "Better that they learn from me how to be gute yidden and menschen, than I learn from them how to be boors and brutes!"

The biography does not tell the rest of the story. But when I related the story to an audience of chassidim a short while ago, I found out about part of the rest of the story. An elderly man in the audience approached me and said, "I am a descendant of that other Rebbe. And our family tradition has it that when his delegation returned with news of their special treatment and of the granted favor, the Rebbe burst into tears and cried, 'He is a better Jew than I am. We must learn a musar haskel (a lesson in ethics) from him.'"

This is a lesson we can all benefit from as we attempt to resolve the conflicts we face, and as we strive to increase the numbers of gute yidden in our ranks and create more menschen in the world.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

##### **A Person Can Gain or Lose His World in One Moment**

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 Shimoni) 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. Kibbutz 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

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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.

## Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Humour is wonderful, but humour can also be dangerous. The Talmud recognises the power of humour and therefore recommends that whenever one is giving a talk, a presentation or a sermon, one should commence with 'mila debdichuta' meaning something lighthearted, something funny – tell a joke. In that way, people will be relaxed and they'll be comfortable to hear what you have to say.

That is something that Korach appreciated. People often ask how is it possible that Korach could have staged his rebellion thinking that it might succeed? After all, there was no need for democracy in the wilderness – Moshe and Aharon had been appointed by none other than Almighty God himself! An even greater question is: How could Korach convince 250 leaders of the people to follow him?

The answer is that he did it with humour. The Midrash explains the opening words of the parsha (Bamidbar 16:1), "Vayikach Korah," – "Korach took."

What he took, according to the Midrash, was a tallit, and he displayed it to those who had been assembled. He showed them the 'ptil techeliet' – the blue cord. As a result of the tzitzit, the Jewish people can wear the garment.

But then he posed a question to Moshe: what happens if you have a garment which is 'kulo techeilet' – the whole garment is blue? Does it require the tzitzit? Moshe answered that of course it does, and then Korach and the assembly burst out laughing.

Next Korach said, "Well, what about a mezuzah?" Thanks to a mezuzah at the

entrance to a room, that room is now kosher for us to live in, but what happens if you have a room in which there are *sifrei Torah*, holy books? The mezuzah just has one paragraph and here the room is full of them – does that room require a mezuzah? Moshe said yes, and again they burst out laughing.

Of course they didn't appreciate the real essence of the mitzvot of tzitzit and mezuzah but Korach purposefully ridiculed Moshe in order to bring people behind him, to make them relaxed so that they would be willing to hear his message.

So from Korach let us remember how positive, constructive and delightful humour can be, but let's also recognise how sometimes it can be abused and can be a danger to our society.

## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

### Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

#### Korach's Ideology of Unprincipled Dissent

Parshat Korach delineates the first formal rebellion against the leadership structure of Klal Yisrael. Considering the gravity of this conflict, also reflected by the severe outcome that befell Korach ve-adato, it is curious that the Torah provides scant information about the origins, content, and objectives of Korach's agenda. "Ki kol haedah kulam kedoshim ubetocham Hashem" (16:3) is certainly an intriguing and consequential theme, but one whose specific parameters are certainly obscure, as the wide range of interpretation demonstrates. The complaint of "rav lachem...u-madua titnaseu al kehal Hashem" underscores the accusation of elitism and unfair diffusion of authority and power, but remains acutely vague. It is left to Chazal to flesh out Korach's agenda and arguments. Their broad and varied insights reinforce the impression that the Torah's muted presentation of the debated details was likely intentional. Notwithstanding the trigger of this specific grievance, perhaps only a pretext, the Korach challenge was perceived then and throughout the ages as a core confrontation about the nature of halachic authority and the character and integrity of halachic observance that transcends particular issues and arguments. For this reason, Korach's rebellion demanded unequivocal resolution and harsh consequences, as the parshah demonstrates.

This perspective is underscored by the Torah's very introduction to the controversy (16:1) – "vayikach Korach...ve-Datan va-Aviram ...ve-On ben Pelet benei Reuven". As the commentators note there is no object connected to the verb "vayikach"! This inspired Unkelos to render "vayikach" as "ve-itpaleg" (he fragmented the national unity), as Rashi approvingly notes. This interpretation is undoubtedly more than an intriguing explanation of an anomalous usage. Perhaps Chazal understood that the Torah profoundly conveys that despite the pretext, Korach's agenda and actions were independent of any real or imagined objective. He fomented

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dissention and rebellion for the sake of disunity and cynically employed argumentation as a mechanism to undermine the principle of halachic authority, and to attack the singular halachic concept of objective halachic norms.

Thus, the Mishnah in Avot perceives the Korach-instigated controversy as the paradigm for insincere, manipulative conflict (machloket shelo le-sheim shamayim). The Semag codifies "ve-lo yiyeh ke-Korach ve-adato" (17:5) as an independent transgression among the 613 mitzvot (based on Sanhedrin 110a - "kol hamachzik be-machloket over be-lo taaseh", in contrast to Rashi ad loc). Rashi (16:1), citing Chazal, asserts that Yaakov's lineage was omitted with respect to Korach - "she-lo yizacher shemo al ha-machloket". While association with dissention is always unpleasant, the status of Korach as a serial and cynical antagonist, as the ideologue of machloket, further precludes any linking with Yaakov-Yisrael, the bechir ha-avot (the premier and integrative [midat tiferet] of the Avot).

While sincere and constructive argumentation, epitomized by the fierce yet idealistic debates of Shamai and Hillel (see Eruvin 13b, characterized in the same Mishnah in Avot as exemplifying "machloket le-sheim shamayim") is oft-admired for its immense contribution to halachic thought, and ultimately for intensifying the bonds of love, mutual respect, and unity of commitment among disputants (Kiddushin 30b - the milchamah shel Torah), unjustified flouting of authority and unprincipled disputation is perceived as immensely destructive. Small wonder that the fate of Korach ve-adato is so dire. Certainly, the unjustified undermining of peace and unity, two indispensable halachic values, constitutes a sufficiently egregious breach to warrant such a harsh response. [The aspiration of "mishpat echad yiyeh lachem", the prohibitions of lo titgodedu, and of zaken mamrei reinforce these themes.]

There is an additional dimension, as well. Targum Yonaton (16:2) projects that "vayakumu lifnei Moshe" indicates that the core violation of Korach and his camp was that they brazenly violated halachic protocol by rendering halachic decisions in the presence of Moshe! ("vayakumu be-chuzpah ve-horuhilcheta be-anpoi Moshe al eisek tichlah"). [See Berachot 31b, Yoma 53a and Ketuvot 60b. See, also Pesikta on 16:1 - "mikan kol hameharher achar rabo ke-meharher achar ha-Shechinah". See Sanhedrin 110a where this principle is rooted in Bamidbar 21:5.] At first glance, this view is puzzling, as it seems to trivialize the transgression (See Chidushei ha-Grim 16:2). Upon reflection, it is evident that the issue is hardly one of etiquette, but is symptomatic of the deeper divide between the two camps. Korach denied the very notion of rabbinic authority and of mesorah. His "kol haedah kulam kedoshim" mantra and his

disruptive "common sense" (Rav Soloveitchik's famous characterization) arguments about tzitzit and mezuzah precluded a perspective of Torah predicated on an inner logic that issues from detailed objective norms that reflect Hashem's Will and a singular Divine system of values. Moshe's effort to underscore that certain principles and institutions are immutable (Rashi's citation of the midrash on "boker" - 16:5) fell on deaf ears. Korach's brazen rejection of halachic etiquette constituted an intentional symbolic challenge to the very fundamental core tenets of halachic mesorah, authority, methodology and the very concept of avodat Hashem by means of maaseh mizvot - strict attention to the demands of specific norms. His attack on Moshe's authority and his negation of Moshe's singular role in mesorah embodied an entire ideology that reduced religious commitment and spirituality to accessible generalities. Moreover, as Rashi cites from the Tanchuma, Korach emphasized only the mass exposure to "Anochi Hashem Elokecha" - just sincere belief, and only what was experienced directly from Hashem - in his argument supporting equal spiritual access to every Jew (see Imrei Avraham on Korach for an elaboration of this insight). His exploitation and method of argumentation quintessentially exemplified "machloket shelo lesheim shamayim", well beyond simple insincerity. It not only disrupted Klal Yisrael's unity and undermined a climate of harmony at a crucial and formative moment of national development, but implicitly challenged the foundational principles of Torah life.

The arguments of Hillel and Shamai, the paradigms of machloket le-sheim shamayim that constitute "eilu ve-eilu divrei Elokim chayim" (Eruvin 13b), employed a common vocabulary, a shared methodology, and were motivated by a unified passionate commitment to halachic life and law as the centerpiece of meaningful existence. Despite and because of the intensity of debate, kevod shamayim and Hashem's Will were strengthened and expanded in the course of these lively, even ferocious debates, lehagdil Torah u-lehadirah. The contrast to Korach's ideology of dissension and unconstrained argumentation that masked his fundamental disregard for the singular character and fundamental principles of Torah life could not be greater.

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

##### Korach Minus Hubris

Place fire into them and put incense upon them before HASHEM tomorrow, and the man whom HASHEM chooses he is the holy one; you have taken too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi." (Bamidbar 16:7)

you have taken too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi: – ...What did Korah, who was astute, see [to commit] this folly? His vision deceived him. He saw [prophetically] a chain

of great people descended from him: Samuel, who is equal to Moshe and Aaron... – Rashi

Welcome to the crime scene with yellow tape and lights flashing. What just happened here? What is the cause of the death of Korach and his congregation? It seems a toxic combination of hubris and being too smart. Rashi tells us he knew a little too much and a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. This may help explain what the Talmud means when it says, "Chochom Adif M'Navi" – "A wise person is greater than a prophet!" Korach felt he would succeed because he saw a great person like Shmuel would descend from him and he did, but only because one son was saved from the pit of destruction. The Chidushei HaRim says that Korach was actually on the same level as Moshe but what he didn't realize is that his spiritual level came from Moshe. He effectively cut off the branch that he was standing on, and from there he went all the way down.

How could such a person produce someone as great as Shmuel HaNavi and how could Shmuel be equal to Moshe and Aaron? No one was greater than Moshe and Aaron. The Talmud in Chulin engages in a great debate. Who was greater than whom? The measuring stick for greatness is much different than what we might imagine. Greater is that which is said about Moshe and Aaron than what is said about Avraham. Regarding Avraham it is written, "I am dust and ashes..." However, by Moshe and Aaron it is written, "What are we...? The world is only maintained because of Moshe and Aaron. It's written here, "What are we...?" And it's written there (Job 26:7), "The world is suspended on bli-mah – silence. (The world hangs in the merit of those who make themselves without- "what"-nothing) in the midst of a fight. (Chulin 89A)

Moshe and Aaron are crowned as being greater because they actually felt about themselves that they were MAH – nothing! It's hard to beat that! However, there is a question here that is waiting to be asked. We recite during Kabbalah Shabbos every Friday Night a verse from Tehillim (99:6) and there is says, "Moshe and Aaron through his service and Shmuel with the calling of his name." From these words the sages learn that Shmuel was equal to both Moshe and Aaron".

How did Shmuel get into this contest? What was his claim to greatness by the standards of ultimate humility? When we take a closer look at the Book of Shmuel, in the very beginning, it describes Chana's desperation for a child. She launched what I would like to call the irresistible prayer. She told HASHEM that she doesn't want this child for herself, so she can bounce him on her knee and feel motherly but rather she wants a child for HASHEM's sake. When she had a child and named him Shmuel there are two different reasons given for this name. One is that Shmuel is a contraction of SHMO, for HIS sake, he is dedicated for E-L!

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Also, Shmuel means, M'HASHEM Shoalti... from HASHEM I requested or borrowed him. In either case, Shmuel was designated and dedicated for serving HASHEM even prior to his conception. It was his mother's pledge to commit him to Divine service that brought him into existence. This was not just lip service. She meant business and the biggest proof is that when he was just two years old, she made him a coat and shipped him off to the holiest man of the generation, Eli. She forfeited the cutest of years to make certain he would be completely subsumed by an environment of holiness. Now we can go back and revisit the verse in Tehillim. How did Moshe and Aaron become great? How were they able to whittle their egos down to almost nonexistence? Through His service! They nullified themselves by willful submission to HASHEM.

How is it that Shmuel was equal to Moshe and Aaron? With the calling of his name! He was nullified prior to conception! He was dedicated before his existence on this earth. Shmuel was born an already humble servant. So, Shmuel was like Korach minus hubris.

#### Mizrahi Dvar Torah

##### Rav Doron Perez: Don't Despair

What is the root of the greatest sins in Chumash? The Sin of the Spies, when ten of the leaders saw the bad in the land, brought the Jewish people to a lack of faith, to cry desperately in the desert, and believe they couldn't go into the land.

Korach challenged Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, his choice of Aharon, and won over 250 leaders of the people, who went to their death believing in their cause.

The Golden Calf was built when the people cried to Aharon that they need to build an idol.

What is at the root of these sins? Despair. When you have nothing to lose, and there is nowhere to go.

When Moshe Rabbeinu didn't come down from the mountain, the person who brought them out of Egypt and their guiding light in the desert, they said that they didn't know what happened to him, and thought there was no way forward without Moshe.

The spies brought themselves and the people to a state of desperation, saying there is no way they can go into the land, they can't go back, and they will end up dying in the desert, leaving the people crying in desperation.

The desperate move by Korach, after the sin of the spies, when that generation realized they will all die in the desert and not go into the land, that is when they rebelled due to their desperation.

This desperation, gloom and doom, is the antithesis of Judaism, as Rebbe Nachman

famously said: "There is no such thing as despair".

There may be difficulty, challenge, pain and tragedy, but not despair. The essence of Judaism is faith and hope. No matter how desperate we feel, the belief in a personal G-d means that things will turn out for the best, no matter how difficult they are.

### Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

#### The Ethics of Controversy

Peace -- personal, domestic, and communal peace -- is considered in the Jewish tradition as the greatest of all blessings. It is regarded as the seal or the climax of the priestly blessings: the blessing of peace.

However, peace should not be understood as unanimity of ideas and uniformity of opinion. It would be exceedingly difficult to establish peace in society if unanimity were a prerequisite. It would be utterly impossible in Jewish society, for Jews are especially not predisposed to uniformity of opinion. From the very beginning of time, our people have been characterized by an independence of thought. The Talmud itself is monumental testimony to the divergence of views and opinions. The Rabbis put it this way: just as the faces of people are dissimilar to each other, so do their opinions differ. And one might add, that just as the variety in physiognomy adds to the aesthetics of living, so does the variety of opinions add to its intellectual stimulation and excitement.

Furthermore, controversy should not always disturb us. The great Maggid of Mezritch, the leading theoretician of Hasidism and one who knew only too well the life of controversy, told us never to be discouraged when we face violent opposition. Sometimes we should accept it as a compliment: the highway robber attacks the man who bears jewels; he never bothers with a man who drives a wagon of straw or refuse.

It is in this sense that the Rabbis knew that controversy can be both bad and good. Sometimes it is constructive, sometimes destructive. In the fourth chapter of Avot, they said the following: Every controversy which is for the sake of Heaven, in the end it will endure. And a controversy which is not motivated by the demands of Heaven, in the end it will not endure. Which is a controversy for the sake of Heaven? -- the disputes between Hillel and Shammai. And which is a controversy not for the sake of Heaven? -- the dispute of Korah and his band against Moses and Aaron.

The Rabbis thus considered controversy as sometimes advisable and of enduring value, and sometimes as destructive and to be shunned. In that case, the whole matter of dispute and contentiousness bears closer analysis, for we are dealing with the ethics of

controversy, and must learn to determine when it is right and when it is wrong. In a generation such as ours, when the vicissitudes of social movement and political opinion have all but rent society apart, when daily life consists of nonnegotiable demands and violent confrontations, of sharp cleavages and loud dissension, it is vital for us to begin to consider at least the fundamentals of the ethics of controversy.

The first source for such an ethic is provided for us by Hillel and Shammai themselves. These two greatest of all the Tannaim were frequently in disagreement with each other. Their debates ranged over the whole of Halakhah. Normally we decide the Halakhah according to Hillel, and only in very few cases does the decision lie with Shammai. Now, the Mishnah (Eduyot, Chap. I) asks: Why is it necessary to mention the opinion of either Shammai or Hillel when that particular view is declared non-acceptable, and the Halakhah remains with his disputant? Would it not have been wiser simply to codify the law according to the view we accept, and not to bother to mention the minority opinion? The Mishnah answers: it comes to teach all future generations that a man should never be persistent in his views, for the "fathers of the world" were not persistent in their views. What the Mishnah means, is that Hillel and Shammai, the fathers of the Oral Torah, the chief channels for the transmission of the sacred Jewish tradition, were people who were constantly engaged in disputes and debates and polemics, but never without mutual respect between them. They were valiant advocates of differing opinions, but they were always intellectually honest, and when one saw that his opinion was weak and that of his opponent was more substantial, he did not hesitate to admit the truth and to yield.

Hillel and Shammai teach us that we must be vigorous in the pursuit of our ideas, but never stubborn; resolute, but never relentless; incorruptible, but never immovable.

In an argument informed by higher ideals, we must have opinions, even strong ones, but we must never be blind to an opponent's thinking. We must neither be closed-minded nor flabby-minded, but keep to the Golden Mean: open-mindedness. In that way, controversy becomes true dialogue, not merely the confrontation of two monologues.

A second guidepost in the ethics of controversy concerns the definition of "for the sake of Heaven." When is a dissenting view motivated by such high ideals, and when is it really informed by ulterior and selfish motives? Unfortunately that is very hard to determine. I am no expert in the history of human controversy, but I should be surprised if there were more than half a dozen cases in all of history in which both sides did not lay complete and absolute claim to "sincerity," "high-mindedness," and "for the sake of

#### Likutei Divrei Torah

Heaven." In a whimsical moment, the Rabbis tell us that Cain and Abel, in their dispute which ultimately ended in fratricide, also claimed, each for himself, the sanction of le-shem shamayim. They divided the world up between them, but fought over a small piece of territory on which the Temple was to be built in later generations. Each one argued: I really have no special hunger for more territory, all I want is this little piece, because on it will be built the Temple, and all I want is le-shem shamayim...

How then are we to discriminate between the contention that is "for the sake of Heaven" and the one that is not? A great and insightful commentator on the Torah of some 400 years ago, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (Maaseh Hashem) offers us a valuable criterion for deciding when an argument is truly genuine and when not. He refers back to the Mishnah which we quoted, but he reads it somewhat differently: This does not mean, he says, that a dispute which is for the sake of Heaven will in the end endure. It means more than that. The word *sof*, "end," has two meanings, even as the word "end" has two meanings in English: that of conclusion and that of purpose, as in "means and ends." Now we read this clause as follows: how do we know if an argument is truly "for the sake of Heaven?" -- if its purpose is endurance and survival, *lehitkayem*. An argument is "for the sake of Heaven" when it strives to perpetuate the institution or ideal or principle which is in dispute.

Thus, when Hillel and Shammai argue about a specific halakhah, that is a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*, because each genuinely desires the perpetuation of Halakhah as such. But, when Koran and his coterie rebelled against Moses, they sought not the security of spiritual leadership, but the destruction of the priesthood and of Moses' leadership: hence, this latter argument was not. Or, for instance, when Zionists argue with non-Zionists about the advisability of the human upbuilding of the Land of Israel, if the non-Zionists are those who have abandoned the hope of Jewish redemption, it is a dispute which is not *le-shem shamayim*, for the non-Zionists in this case have no desire of preserving and enhancing the object of the debate, namely, the Land of Israel. But if the non-Zionists are those who passionately desire the welfare of the Land of Israel, but happen to believe that it should not be achieved by human means, but by Divine means, then even if we disagree with them we must grant that it is a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. Similarly, if Democrats and Republicans, or Conservatives and Liberals argue about the nature of the American Government, then it is, in civic terms, a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*, because both wish the safety of the republic. When Administration and students argue about the nature of the university, then no matter how violent the confrontation, it is a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* provided that both do want a stronger university, a place in which the free

exchange and development of ideas can take place. But if the students arrange the confrontation because they want to tear down the university as the weakest social institution which will invite the collapse of the rest of society, it is not *sofah le-hitkayem* and therefore not a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. I submit that this is a criterion which can be used to good advantage in deciding the nature of many a contemporary public controversy. A third insight for an ethic of controversy is a bit more subtle. Let us grant that two opinions in dispute with each other are both *le-shem shamayim*, that they are similar to the arguments of Hillel and Shammai, and not of Korah and Moses. In such a case, while the argument must for practical reasons sooner or later be resolved one way or another, nevertheless both opinions remain valid and endure in theory -- both survive and both remain. Whereas in a controversy which is not for the sake of Heaven, such opinions which are not properly motivated fade away and cannot endure.

What is the difference if an opinion remains valid theoretically, if in practice we do not act on it? Simply this: that ultimately conditions may change, and then decisions may change too, and an opinion temporarily rejected may later be accepted as valid, whereas the one now accepted may later go into eclipse. This is the meaning of the passage in our literature which tells us that when Hillel and Shammai were engaged in their debates, a Heavenly Voice issued forth and proclaimed: "Both these and these are the words of the Living God." It is true that for practical purposes we almost always accept the opinion of Hillel and not the opinion of Shammai; nevertheless, the opinions of Shammai remain valid opinions, they constitute the heart and the substance of Torah as such. If a man should decide to spend a lifetime studying only the rejected opinions of Shammai, he fulfills the commandment of the study of Torah to the same degree and extent as a man who studies only the opinions of Hillel which are accepted as halakhah.

In a remarkable passage, the Zohar tells us that whereas in our times we accept the opinions of Hillel over Shammai, nevertheless, in the great future after the Messiah, the decisions will change, and the opinions of Shammai will prevail. This is precisely what the Zohar meant: An opinion may not be accepted in practice, but if it is "for the sake of Heaven," it retains its very sanctity and its survival is secured.

Now this does not hold true for all controversies, but only those *le-shem shamayim*. The disagreement, for instance, by those who are true to the Torah tradition, and those who deny the validity of Torah in modern times, is not a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. To apply to such disputes the facile sleight of hand of quoting the passage *elu ve'elu divrei Elokim Hayyim* is intellectually

dishonest. The words of those who deny the Torah of the Living God, cannot be called *divrei Elokim Hayyim*. However, if Torah is accepted, but there is a debate as to how it should be understood and how it should be effected, such as the dispute between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim, that is a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* -- and there both opinions endure, and we may choose a different answer for different circumstances. Or, the dispute between those who insist that Jewish education should consist of "Torah only," against those who follow some version of the Torah *im Derekh Eretz* school, insisting upon the combination of Torah with general culture -- this too is a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* and of this too we may say *sofah le-hitkayem*. Therefore there are places and there are times when we may opt for one answer, and places and times when another solution commands itself. Although immediately, for now, we may accept only one view, the other nevertheless remains a viable and living option, ready for adoption when the times permit.

What we have mentioned is but the beginning of a framework for the ethics of controversy. It is important to make such a beginning, in order to find our way through the contentions of our period of history.

"The Lord will give His people strength, the Lord will bless His people with peace." *Oze*, strength, is defined as "Torah," or, in other words, moral strength. Why is it necessary? Because *shalom* or peace does not mean uniformity or unanimity of opinion. It means, rather, a state of friendship and love and mutual respect, even while differences of opinion are encouraged, even during controversy, even in the midst of dispute. And to achieve this equilibrium -- argument and peace, dispute and respect, controversy and love -- for this one needs wisdom and intelligence, and, above all, the kind of moral strength that comes from Torah: *oze*. Hashem *yevarekh et am ba-shalom*.

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**Home Weekly Parsha KORACH**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) is of the general opinion that events, as recorded in the Torah, occurred in a linear timeline. This is in spite of the maxim that there is no late or early in the Torah. He limits that rule to certain halachic instances as they appear in the Talmud. Thus the story of Korach and his contest against Moshe that forms the central part of this week's parsha occurred after the tragedy of the spies and their negative report about the Land of Israel.

As I have commented before, the negative report of the spies was motivated, according to rabbinic opinion, by personal interests having no objective value as to the issue of the Land of Israel itself. So too, this uprising against Moshe led by Korach is also not an issue of justice or objective benefit to the people, but rather it is motivated purely by the personal issues and jealousies of Korach and his followers.

Both Korach and the spies masked their own personal drives for power and position with high-sounding principles of public good, social justice and great concern for the future of the people of Israel. The very shrillness of their concern for the good of society itself calls attention to their true motives – they protested too much!

Pious disclaimers of any self-interest seem to always accompany those that clamor for social betterment and a more just society. But it is often personal ambition and the drive to acquire power over others that is the true face of these movements and individuals. All of the dictators of the past and present centuries promised great improvements for their peoples and countries and yet all, without exception, eventually only pursued their own personal gain and power. Always beware of those who speak in the name of the people. Most of the time they are only imitations of Korach.

This is perhaps an insight as to why Moshe took such a strong stand against Korach and demanded an exemplary punishment from Heaven. It is extremely difficult for humans to judge the true motives of others in their declarations and policies. Only Heaven, so to speak, can do so. Moshe's plea to Heaven is directed not only against the current Korach that he faces, but it is also against the constant recurrences of other Korachs throughout Jewish and world history.

Only a shocking miracle of the earth swallowing Korach and his followers and of a fire consuming those who dared to offer incense in place of Aharon, would impress the historical psyche of Israel, as to be wary of Korach's imitators through the ages.

There is an adage in Jewish life that one should always respect others but also be wary of their true motives. Only regarding Moshe does the Torah testify that as the true servant of God, he is above criticism and suspicion. But ordinary mortals have ordinary failings and self-interest is one of those failings. Moshe is true and his Torah is true. After that, no matter how fetching the slogan or how glorious the promise, caution and wariness about the person and cause being advocated are the proper attitudes to embrace.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**  
**Parshas Korach**

**A Perception of Uncaring Leadership Fueled Korach's Rebellion**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1298 – The Shul That Did Not Say Tachanun By Mistake; Now What? and Other Tachanun Issues. Good Shabbos!

There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to when exactly the story of Korach transpired. The Torah places it after Parshas Shelach, immediately following the gezeyra (heavenly decree) that Bnei Yisrael must wander in the desert for forty years as a punishment for the

incident of the meraglim (spies). The Ibn Ezra holds that this parsha is not placed in its correct sequential order, and the story of Korach actually happened prior to the incident of the meraglim.

There is a certain logic behind the Ibn Ezra's theory. Chazal say that Korach was motivated to start his rebellion by jealousy over the appointment of Elitzafon ben Uziel as the nasi of Shevet Levi. Korach resented a perceived slight on the part of Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach figured that there were four sons of Levi. Amram (the father of Moshe and Aharon) was the oldest. Yitzhar (the father of Korach) was the second son. Chevron was the third son. Uziel (the father of Elitzafon) was the youngest of the four brothers.

Rashi notes that Korach was willing to accept that Moshe was the "king" and Aharon was the "Kohen Gadol" (High Priest), because they were both sons of Levi's eldest son. However, Korach, who did not recognize that the appointment of Elitzafon as nasi was by the word of Hashem, felt that he deserved the next honorific appointment, owing to the fact that he was the next oldest cousin in the family! This is what irked Korach and prompted him to lead his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon.

Based on the fact that Elitzafon's appointment happened at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, it makes a lot of sense to suggest that Korach's rebellion occurred prior to the story in Parshas Shelach. Why would Korach suddenly start his rebellion now after Parshas Shelach?

There is a very important Ramban that addresses this question. The Ramban writes that up until this point, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to ride out any crises that developed in leading the nation. Even after the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf), Moshe was able to pray for the nation and acquire Divine forgiveness. He writes that Moshe achieved extreme popularity amongst the people and they would not countenance any challenge to his leadership. The people loved Moshe Rabbeinu and would stone any person who attempted to question their beloved leader. According to the Ramban, Korach suffered in silence while Moshe's popularity was at its peak. Korach "kept his powder dry" so to speak. However, when they arrived at Midbar Paran, things started falling apart. People were burned by fire at Taveirah and there were many deaths at Kivros haTa'avah. After the aveira of the meraglim, Moshe did not even pray for forgiveness and was unable to cancel the Heavenly Decree. At this point, the people's spirit plunged and they had complaints about their leader. Korach felt that this was the time to make his move. He thought that now the people would listen to his message of rebellion.

This Ramban sheds light on another Rashi. Rashi comments that Korach was a pikayach (clever person). Where do we see that Korach was so clever? I believe we see it because a fool "rushes in." A fool has no patience. An idea pops into his head and he immediately wants to implement it, whether the time is ripe or not. The ability for a person to bide his time and pick the right moment and the right spot to make a move requires wisdom and cleverness.

However, it is surprising that this Ramban writes that Moshe Rabbeinu did not pray for the people after the decree of death in the wilderness for the generation that accepted the evil report of the meraglim. This statement seems to be refuted by explicit pesukim in Parshas Shelach (Bamidbar 14:13-19). In fact, Hashem responded to Moshe: "...I have forgiven according to your words." (Bamidbar 14:20). So what does the Ramban mean that Moshe did not pray for them after the sin of the meraglim?

The Ramban clarifies his intention: Moshe Rabbeinu was, in effect, able to get the punishment decree for the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav nullified. "...On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them." (Shemos 32:34). While the Ribono shel Olam did, in effect, leave that aveira on the back burner, His original threat of total annihilation was withdrawn. However, by the aveira of the meraglim, the Ramban writes: "Perhaps Moshe knew that the decree was stretched out against them and would never be rescinded." Moshe understood that the best he could accomplish was to mitigate Hashem's

decree of wiping out the entire nation right then, followed by rebuilding Klal Yisrael just from Moshe Rabbeinu and his descendants. Moshe did accomplish getting rescinded the decree for the nation to be wiped out immediately. It took forty years for that generation to die out, but at least the following generation was permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael.

The people, however, did not realize all this. They thought that Moshe Rabbeinu had supreme powers of prayer, and that if he would have only davened intensely enough, the entire decree would have been nullified. It must be, they concluded, that Moshe did not daven for them at all. It was this erroneous sentiment that Korach was able to stoke among the discontented in the nation and get them to conclude: If Moshe Rabbeinu won't daven for us, then who needs Moshe Rabbeinu?

There is a great irony here. The people loved Moshe Rabbeinu and had the greatest respect for him. They had so much confidence in him they felt that if he would only have davened, he could have nullified the decree. Therefore, since the decree was not nullified, they concluded he was not using his powers to defend them, and consequently they were ready to depose him from his leadership role.

We can make two observations about this scenario advanced by the Ramban:

First, what happened to hakaras hatov? Moshe Rabbeinu has been with the Jewish people through all their trials and tribulations. He took them out of Mitzraim, brought them across the Yam Suf (Red Sea), and saved them from the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav. And now, because he can't totally gain Divine forgiveness for their grievous aveira, they toss him overboard?

Many years ago, General Motors had a commercial advertisement, which began: "It is uniquely American to ask, 'What have you done for me lately?'" This always bothered me. This attitude may be uniquely American but it is totally an anathema to the fundamental attitudes of Klal Yisrael. When someone has a long track record of service and accomplishment, he should not be instantly tossed for one error, particularly by those who do not understand the full picture of what has transpired.

The second observation: Why did the people turn against Moshe? It is because they came to the conclusion that he did not daven for them, and if he did not daven for them, it must be because he did not care about their fate. They were wrong about Moshe not caring, but they were right that it is a cardinal crime for a Jewish leader not to care about the people. A leader who doesn't care cannot be my leader!

President Theodore Roosevelt once expressed a very important maxim: "People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care." This is a very powerful rule, basic advice for any rabbi, any rav, for any teacher, and for any person in any educational position. The people, unfortunately, came to the erroneous conclusion that Moshe Rabbeinu did not care for them anymore. If he doesn't care anymore then he can't be our leader. Therefore, when Korach came and told them it is time for a new leader, they were ready to agree with him.

#### Egalitarianism Leads to Baseless Hatred

The following observation comes from the Be'er Moshe, the Ozharover Rebbe.

Korach came up with a complaint that has currency in every generation: "For the entire community is holy; so why do you elevate yourselves over the Congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3) The egalitarian refrain "Why are you any better than us" echoes throughout the history of leadership.

The Gemara says (Shabbos 119b) that Yerushalayim was destroyed only because they equated the katan (small) with the gadol (great). The Gemara marshals a pasuk "And the nation will be like the Kohen..." (Yeshayahu 24:2) The Be'er Moshe asks that this Talmudic statement seems to contradict another statement in the Gemara (Yoma 9b) that Yerushalayim was destroyed (in the time of the second Bais Hamikdash) because of baseless hatred (sinas chinam). If the prevailing attitude was that everyone was the same (gadol = katan), then on what basis did they have mutual resentment and hatred?

The Be'er Moshe answers that this question is based on a mistaken premise: It is not true that when you believe everyone is the same that

there will not be baseless hatred. To the contrary: When there is a prevailing mindset that everyone is the same, that is when there will be sinas chinam. If everyone is the same "So, why are YOU the leader?" Sinas chinam and egalitarianism are two sides of the same coin. Why are you the boss, the manhig, the rav, etc? I am as good as you are! The Be'er Moshe brings an example: A person has a body. Every part of the body is important. But not all body parts are the same. Given a choice between losing a pinky and losing one's heart, what would a person choose? The pinky, the finger, and even a leg are not limbs without which life cannot be sustained. However, a person cannot live without a heart or without a brain. We are all one body, and all body parts are working with one goal – to keep the person alive. But there are differences. There is a hierarchy of priority, of importance.

The same is true in Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael works because there are levels or categories. Someone who recognizes that there are levels and that there are people who are supposed to lead, realizes that there is a category called talmidei chachomim and there is a category called Kohanim. Not everyone is on the same level and therefore not everyone can be a leader. That is what the Gemara means in Shabbos 119b. The fact that they equated the katan with the gadol generated baseless hatred in Klal Yisrael.

The proof of the matter is the rallying cry of Korach's rebellion: "For the entire nation is holy!" What happened because of that? There was machlokes. When people are willing to accept the idea that there are leaders and there are followers; people who are supposed to make the decisions and people who are supposed to accept the decisions, then society can function. Otherwise, the outcome is Parshas Korach.

#### Wisdom Is Required To See the Obvious in Times of Passion

The pasuk lists Korach's co-conspirators: Dasan, Aviram, and Ohn ben Peles of Shevet Reuven. We know what happened to Korach and we know what happened to Dasan and Aviram. But what ever happened to "Ohn ben Peles"? The famous Gemara in Sanhedrin (110a) states that Ohn was saved by his wife. She told him that he had nothing to gain from the fight. Either Moshe would end up remaining as the leader or Korach would become the leader. Either way, Ohn would remain a powerless and uninfluential follower.

Ohn accepted her logic but was hesitant to abandon his promise to join the rebellion. According to the famous Gemara, Mrs. Ohn gave her husband wine to drink, causing him to sleep through the whole "call to battle." The Korach mob came to Ohn's door to summon him to take part in their rebellion. Mrs. Ohn sat in front of the house with her hair uncovered. The mob didn't want to intrude on her privacy, they left and, consequently, she is credited with having saved her husband.

The Talmud relates this incident to the pasuk in Mishlei (14:1) "The wisdom of women built her house..." But, isn't this Gemara being overly generous with the praise it lavishes on the wife of Ohn ben Peles? What type of outstanding "wisdom" did she demonstrate here? She basically just told it to her husband like it is: "It is either Korach or Moshe. You have absolutely nothing to gain in this fight." Where is the great wisdom here?

The answer is that to keep cool and think straight in the time of machlokes, when passions are elevated, requires wisdom. In a time of machlokes, everybody loses it. In argumentative times, everyone becomes emotional. When people are emotional, they don't think straight. A logical thinker with a cool mind, who can overcome the passion of the moment, has great wisdom. Ohn's wife could see the truth in the context of the mob's passion. That is the "Chachmas nashim bansa beisa."

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#### Taking It Personally

##### **KORACH**

##### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

When we read the story of Korach, our attention tends to be focused on the rebels. We don't give as much reflection as we might to the response of Moses. Was it right? Was it wrong? It's a complex story. As the Ramban explains, it is no accident that the Korach rebellion happened in the aftermath of the story of the spies. So long as the people expected to

enter the Promised Land, they stood to lose more than they could gain by challenging Moses' leadership. He had successfully negotiated all obstacles in the past. He was their best hope. But now a whole generation was condemned to die in the wilderness. Now they had nothing to lose. When people have nothing to lose, rebellions happen.

Next, let us examine the constitution of rebels themselves. It's clear from the narrative that they were not a uniform or unified group. The Malbim explains that there were three different groups, each with their own grievance and agenda. First was Korach himself, a cousin to Moses. Moses was the child of Kehat's eldest son, Amram. As the child of Kehat's second son, Yitzhar, Korach felt entitled to the second leadership role, that of High Priest.

Second were Datan and Aviram, who felt that they were entitled to leadership positions as descendants of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn.

Third were the 250 others, described by the Torah as "Princes of the Assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown." Either they felt that they had earned the right to be leaders on meritocratic grounds, or – Ibn Ezra's suggestion – they were firstborns who resented the fact that the role of ministering to God was taken from the firstborn sons and given to the Levites after the sin of the Golden Calf. A coalition of the differently discontented: that is how rebellions tend to start.

What was Moses' reaction to their rebellion? His first response is to propose a simple, decisive test: Let everyone bring an offering of incense, and then let God decide whose to accept. But the derisive, insolent response of Datan and Aviram seems to unnerve him. He turns to God and says:

"Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

Num. 16:15

But they had not said that he had. That is the first discordant note.

God then threatens to punish the whole congregation. Moses and Aaron intercede on their behalf. God tells Moses to separate the community from the rebels so that they will not be caught up in the punishment, which Moses does. But he then does something unprecedented. He says: "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all humankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."

Num. 16:28-30

This was the only time Moses asked God to punish someone, and the only time he challenged Him to perform a miracle.

God does as Moses asks. Naturally we expect that this will end the rebellion: God has sent an unmistakable sign that Moses was right, the rebels wrong. But it doesn't. Far from ending the rebellion, things now escalate:

The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the Lord's people," they said.

Num. 17:6

The people gather around Moses and Aaron as if about to attack them. God starts smiting the people with a plague. Moses tells Aaron to make atonement, and eventually the plague stops. But some 14,700 people have died. Not until a quite different demonstration takes place – when Moses takes twelve rods representing the twelve tribes, and Aaron's buds and blossoms and bears fruit – does the rebellion finally end.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Moses' intervention, challenging God to make the earth swallow his opponents, was a tragic mistake. If so, what kind of mistake was it?

The Harvard leadership expert, Ronald Heifetz, makes the point that it is essential for a leader to distinguish between role and self. A role is a position we hold. The self is who we are. Leadership is a role. It is not an identity. It is not who we are. Therefore a leader should never take an attack on their leadership personally:

It's a common ploy to personalise the debate over issues as a strategy for taking you out of action . . . You want to respond when you are attacked

. . . You want to leap into the fray when you are mischaracterised . . . When people attack you personally, the reflexive reaction is to take it personally . . . But being criticised by people you care about is almost always a part of exercising leadership . . . When you take personal attacks personally, you unwittingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of action – you make yourself the issue.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, pp. 130, 190-191.

Moses twice takes the rebellion personally. First, he defends himself to God after being insulted by Datan and Aviram. Second, he asks God miraculously and decisively to show that he – Moses – is God's chosen leader. But Moses was not the issue. He had already taken the right course of action in proposing the test of the incense offering. That would have resolved the question. As for the underlying reason that the rebellion was possible at all – the fact that the people were devastated by the knowledge that they would not live to enter the Promised Land – there was nothing Moses could do.

Moses allowed himself to be provoked by Korach's claim, "Why do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly" and by Datan and Aviram's offensive remark, "And now you want to lord it over us!" These were deeply personal attacks, but by taking them as such, Moses allowed his opponents to define the terms of engagement. As a result, the conflict was intensified instead of defused.

It is hard not to see this as the first sign of the failing that would eventually cost Moses his chance of leading the people into the land. When, almost forty years later, he says to the people who complain about the lack of drink, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10), he shows the same tendency to personalise the issue ("must we bring you water?") – but it never was about "we" but about God.

The Torah is devastatingly honest about Moses, as it is about all its heroes. Humans are only human. Even the greatest makes mistakes. In the case of Moses, his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. His anger at injustice singled him out as a leader in the first place. But he allowed himself to be provoked to anger by the people he led, and it was this, according to Rambam (Eight Chapters, ch. 4), that eventually caused him to forfeit his chance of entering the Land of Israel.

Heifetz writes:

"Receiving anger . . . is a sacred task . . . Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change."

Ibid. pp. 142-146.

After the episode of the spies, Moses faced an almost impossible task. How do you lead a people when they know they will not reach their destination in their lifetime? In the end what stilled the rebellion was the sight of Aaron's rod, a piece of dry wood, coming to life again, bearing flowers and fruit. Perhaps this was not just about Aaron but about the Israelites themselves. Having thought of themselves as condemned to die in the desert, perhaps they now realised that they too had borne fruit – their children – and it would be they who completed the journey their parents had begun. That, in the end, was their consolation.

Of all the challenges of leadership, not taking criticism personally and staying calm when the people you lead are angry with you, may be the hardest of all. That may be why the Torah says what it does about Moses, the greatest leader who ever lived. It is a way of warning future generations: if at times you are pained by people's anger, take comfort. So did Moses. But remember the price Moses paid, and stay calm.

Though it may seem otherwise, the anger you face has nothing to do with you as a person and everything to do with what you stand for and represent. Depersonalising attacks is the best way to deal with them. People get angry when leaders cannot magically make harsh reality disappear. Leaders in such circumstances are called on to accept that anger with grace. That truly is a sacred task.

### Rectifying the Sin of the Spies

#### Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Achieving stable peace will only be possible if the State of Israel clarifies that when it wins, it will change borders in its favor \* We

cannot achieve peace and prosperity through agreements \* Returning to the vision of Redemption and settling the Land is also the best way to achieve security and peace \* In the first stage, Gaza must be conquered, and full military rule imposed \* This should also be the policy in Judea and Samaria: to apply Israeli sovereignty over all Jewish settlements and uninhabited areas

Israel has been dealing with two great challenges from its earliest days, until today: adherence to one God, and its full manifestation in the Land. The 'Sin of the Golden Calf' and the 'Sin of the Spies'. Heaven and earth. When we complete these two challenges, we will merit complete Redemption. This Shabbat, it is appropriate to address the continued rectification of the 'Sin of the Spies'.

#### Asymmetry

Our difficult problem is the asymmetry between us and our surrounding enemies. If the Muslims win, God forbid, they will destroy the state, kill many, and enslave the rest. If we win, we will strive to reach a peace agreement with them. In such a situation, the continuation of the war is guaranteed, as it is always worthwhile for them to try to fight, for even if they lose, we will not defeat them – we will not nullify their political existence, we will not expel them, and we will not impose our position and values on them. If they win, they will achieve all their murderous desires.

The only possibility for correcting the asymmetry and achieving stable peace, is for the State of Israel to clarify that when it wins, it will change the internal regime of those who fight against it, change borders in its favor, and as needed – continue to impose its position by force of arms. This applies to Judea and Samaria, Gaza and southern Lebanon, and if necessary – all of Lebanon. This will not be done at once, rather gradually, but we must declare that this is what we will strive for.

#### The Problem

The problem is that the majority of the Jewish public still hopes it can achieve a peace agreement with the enemy. Another problem – many believe it is immoral for the State of Israel to rule over a hostile population. These two reasons have caused the army and government to lack a plan on how to defeat the enemy, and preserve the fruits of victory.

However, in practice, there is no choice – we cannot achieve peace and prosperity through agreements. Even from a moral standpoint, it is not moral to make agreements with murderous enemies. It is not moral towards us, and not moral towards many Arabs who were willing to live with us in peace, and under the cover of agreements we made with terrorist leaders, became enslaved to cruel rulers.

#### Learning from World Experience

In World War II, the United States waged an all-out war against Japan. It dropped atomic bombs on it, until the Japanese understood that if they continued to fight, their country would be destroyed, and entire populations would be exterminated. When they realized this, they surrendered unconditionally. After that, the United States demanded that Japan cancel the previous regime, dictated a democratic constitution to them, and by force of arms, forced them to uphold the constitution, and to this day, there are American military bases in Japan to enforce the surrender agreements. Since then, the United States and Japan have been good friends. Not only that, since then, Japan has achieved economic and social prosperity, and has become one of the leading countries in the world. This is how ideological and value-based positions can be completely changed, and stable peace can be achieved for generations, leading to the prosperity of both sides.

There are additional examples of nations that defeated the vanquished, and were content with not allowing them to strengthen, for example, in Eastern European countries that surrendered to the Soviet Union. This method proved to be less successful, because it did not provide a horizon for the conquered. It did ensure peace, but not prosperity and freedom. As such, the Soviet Union was constantly forced to continue to powerfully impose its influence, and when it disintegrated, the old resentment returned to its place.

#### The Enemy Can Be Defeated

When the vast majority of the public understands that we must conquer all the territories in which the enemy has established itself and rule them forever, we will see that this is possible, and even easier than managing a conflict without resolution. Then it will become clear that returning to the vision of Redemption, and settling the Land, is also the best way to achieve security and peace.

In the first stage should be to conquer Gaza and impose full military rule. The sparsely populated areas should be expropriated, and full Israeli sovereignty applied to them. At the same time, densely populated areas should be fully controlled in order to eliminate any influence of remnants of the previous regime, fundamentally change educational programs, prohibit all religious incitement, and nurture peace-seeking religious leadership. In the second stage, civilian rule can be transferred to population representatives who will be loyal to the State of Israel.

This should also be the policy in Judea and Samaria, namely, to apply Israeli sovereignty over all Jewish settlements and uninhabited areas. To abolish the Palestinian Authority that incites the entire world against us, and nurtures terrorism economically and ideologically, in order to destroy the State of Israel in the following stage. In its place, impose military rule that will initially manage civilian life as well, in order to change educational programs, and expel all inciters. Afterwards, find positive forces in each area willing to cooperate with our values, and assist them, instead of assisting enemies like the PLO and Hamas. Over the past decades, the State of Israel has assisted the PLO and Hamas with tens of billions of shekels, granted them international status, and enlisted additional countries to assist them. Instead, we should assist positive forces who are willing to live in civilian autonomy, under our control.

Only during the stage of defeat and establishment, will large military forces need to hold the territory; but following this, it will be possible to continue ruling with small forces, provided they are backed by a firm decision that, from now on, the State of Israel will rule over all territories of the Land of Israel.

#### The Moral Examination

Even from a moral standpoint, this is much better than what is happening today. A partial example of this can be brought from the Arab population living in the State of Israel. Economically, and in terms of human rights, their situation is superior to that of all Arabs in Arab countries. Most of the problems with them stem from the fact that, unfortunately, we did not demand that they be loyal citizens, with full rights conditional on full obligations, as is demanded, for example, of all Jews in all countries of the world. As a result, among Arab citizens of Israel, there are inciters who exploit our humane position, interpret it as weakness, and succeed in inciting not a few Arabs against us. The weakness of our position towards them is also bad for them. The crime rampant in Arab society is a result of disloyal citizenship. Instead of being grateful to the State of Israel, those inciters prefer to behave like their brothers in neighboring countries, who through an evil interpretation of religious values, manage family and social life with murderous violence, and block positive forces from developing in education, economic, and social initiatives.

#### The Educational Mission

Unfortunately, Israeli society is not yet ready for this. We must learn a lesson from the bitter experience of decades, and encourage the groups and leaders who advocate these positions, until with God's help, they become the property of the majority, and we can reach a stable, state of peace.

This is a stage in the process of Redemption, in which we need to be redeemed from the consciousness of the 'persecuted minority' in exile, to the consciousness of a majority that aspires to arrange its sovereign life in the most successful way, both in terms of stability, and morality. We must be redeemed from the consciousness of "we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes," to the consciousness of a sovereign people who strives to liberate its Land, and be sovereign in it. A people that offers the enemy three options: Those who want to make peace – will make peace, and fully accept Israeli sovereignty, with all its values and laws. Those who want to fight – will

fight, and know that we will wage an all-out war against them. And those who want to emigrate – will emigrate. And we must not agree to a fourth option – that they remain in the Land as enemies, to be a snare and a trap (Jerusalem Talmud, Shevitt 6:1).

In order for the State of Israel to be able to adopt the correct policy, a large majority of the public needs to be convinced. In the meantime, we must continue to fight on the front lines to guard our people and our Land, and devote ourselves more to educational and public work. The debate between right and left is tragic – each side thinks the other's way is disastrous, and nevertheless, we must continue to conduct ourselves together in our war against the enemy. Therefore, value and educational clarifications need to take place, with respect for those with different opinions. However, it can be assumed that, in the end, logic and truth will prevail, and the people of Israel will be able to move on to the next stage of sovereignty and stability in our Land.

Even among the Spies, there were only two who chose correctly, Joshua and Caleb, and because of the majority position, Redemption was delayed. However, after forty years, the people of Israel went with Joshua and Caleb, conquered the Land, and settled in it.

#### Our Holy Heroic Soldiers

We must draw strength from the heroism of our soldiers. In a complex reality, with severe restrictions, they continue to fight the enemy, and win. Unfortunately, in the streets of Tel Aviv, divisive voices have resurfaced, but in the army, among regular and reserve soldiers, the unity of Israel and mutual responsibility are revealed in an awe-inspiring manner. From all the wonderful stories of self-sacrifice, one can understand that the Divine Presence dwells in the soldiers' camps, as it is said: "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you" (Deuteronomy 23:15). And the continuation is praise and commandment: "Therefore, shall your camp be holy." Since they sacrifice their lives to defend God's people, it is a holy camp.

We will strive to sanctify the camp as much as possible from any moral flaw, from dispute and slander, from vulgarity and mockery, and out of this, we will pray for all our soldiers to return home whole in body and soul, and to merit establishing glorious families in Israel with joy and love, and the many who have already merited establishing families, may they merit to maintain them with joy and happiness, and may they derive pleasure for many days and years.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

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#### Parshat Korach: Good and Bad Controversies

#### Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"And Korach took..." (Numbers 16:1)

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

In addition to the problematic issue of the positive description of a "controversy for the sake of heaven," it is difficult to understand why the Mishna refers to one type of controversy as that of Hillel and Shammai, the two antagonists, and the other as that of Korach and his cohorts, rather than Korach and Moses, which we would have expected.

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

eventually arrive at a synthesis or a dialectic, a resolution of both positions!

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

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

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

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

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

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

This great truth was one of the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, who claimed that multiplicity of ideas is actually the key to understanding God's truth: "Scholars increase peace in the world." A multiplicity of peace means that all sides and all views must be considered; then it will be clarified how each one of them has its

place, each one in accordance with its value, its place, and its specific issue.... Only through a collection of all parts and all details, all of those ideals which appear to be different, and all disparate professional opinions, only by means of these will the light of truth and righteousness be revealed, and the wisdom of the Lord, and His love, and the light of true Torah." (Ein Ayah, end of Berakhot)

Shabbat Shalom

## In honor of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh...

### Ata Yatzarta – An Unusual Beracha

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: An Unusual Blessing

"Why does Shabbos Rosh Chodesh have a completely different middle beracha rather than simply having a Rosh Chodesh insert in the Shabbos davening, or a Shabbos insert in the Rosh Chodesh davening?"

Question #2: Missing My Chatas

"Why is no korban chatas offered on Shabbos?"

Question #3: Shortchanged Yom Tov

"Why is Rosh Chodesh the only special day mentioned in the Torah that is not a Yom Tov?"

Answer:

When a holiday falls on Shabbos, the tefillah that we recite is usually the regular prayer either of the holiday or of Shabbos, with an addition or additions to include mention of the other special day. For example, when the major Yomim Tovim (Sukkos, Pesach, Shevuos, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) fall on Shabbos, we recite the regular Yom Tov prayer, with added mention of Shabbos in the middle beracha. On the lesser holidays (Chol Hamoed, Rosh Chodesh, Chanukah and Purim), for most tefillos we recite the customary Shabbos prayer and add an extra paragraph, either Yaaleh Veyavo or Al Hanissim, at its appropriate place, to reflect the sanctity of the holiday. On Musaf of Shabbos Chol Hamoed, we recite the Musaf of Yom Tov with added mention of Shabbos in the middle beracha.

Ata Yatzarta -- A special prayer

The one exception to this rule is the Musaf that we recite when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos. On Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, the middle beracha of the Musaf is an entirely new beracha that does not simply combine the elements of the Shabbos Musaf and that of the weekday Rosh Chodesh Musaf. Rather, it includes aspects of the Musaf of Yom Tov, and the prayer includes a unique introduction that appears in no other prayer. Thus, the sum is greater than its parts – the combination of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh creates a greater kedusha than either has on its own. Explaining this phenomenon is the thrust of this week's essay, but first I need to explain certain themes more thoroughly.

A Review of Rosh Chodesh Musaf

Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and the Yomim Tovim are embellished with a tefillah called Musaf. While each of our three daily tefillos, Shacharis, Mincha, and Maariv corresponds to a part of the service that was performed daily in the Beis Hamikdash (Berachos 26b), Musaf corresponds to the special korbanos described in parshas Pinchas that were offered in the Beis Hamikdash on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and holidays.

With this background, we can now begin to examine the unique text of the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Musaf. As I mentioned above, the central beracha of this tefillah is unusual; it contains aspects of four different themes. The beracha begins with a declaration, Ata Yatzarta Olamcha Mikkedem, "You fashioned Your world from the very beginning," a declaration that certainly reflects the inherent concepts of both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh; yet, this declaration appears in none of the four regular Shabbos tefillos, nor in the weekday Rosh Chodesh Musaf. This is highly unusual, particularly when we realize that, on all other occasions when Shabbos coincides with another special day, the wording of the prayers always reflects the exact text of either Shabbos or Yom Tov, and never a new version.

The special Musaf beracha then proceeds: Ahavta osanu veratzisa banu, "You loved us and desired us," a text that appears in the Musaf of Yom Tov. Again, this is unusual, since this wording never appears either in

the usual Shabbos or in the usual Rosh Chodesh prayers. How does a theme unique to Yom Tov find its way into Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, which is not a Yom Tov?

The next sentence, beginning with the words Yehi ratzon, is a text that is common to both the Shabbos and the Yom Tov Musaf prayers, and this passage then introduces the actual korbanos of both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh. From this point onward, the prayer continues along predictable patterns, blending together the Musaf of a common Shabbos and a weekday Rosh Chodesh into one beracha commemorative of both occasions.

Yismechu Bemalchuscha

Included in the Ata Yatzarta prayer is the passage, Yismechu bemalchuscha shomrei Shabbos, "Those who observe the Shabbos shall celebrate Your kingship," a special prayer that the Jewish people will enjoy their celebration of Shabbos as they recognize Hashem's dominion and beneficence. In Nusach Ashkenaz, this prayer is recited every Shabbos Musaf, even when Shabbos coincides with Yom Tov or Rosh Chodesh. Nusach Sefard includes this passage also in Maariv and Shacharis of Shabbos. (The Avudraham records a custom in some communities not to recite Yismechu bemalchuscha in regular Shabbos Musaf and to recite it only on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. The Avudraham himself disapproves of this practice, and I am unaware of any community that follows this custom today.)

Closing the beracha

Returning to Ata Yatzarta, we close this beracha with a text that is standard for the central beracha of all Shabbos and Yom Tov prayers. The conclusion of the middle beracha of Musaf always notes the special features of the day we are celebrating.

Why Ata Yatzarta?

At this point, let us address the original question we posed: "Why does Shabbos Rosh Chodesh merit its own special Musaf prayer, rather than simply having a Rosh Chodesh insert in the Shabbos davening, or a Shabbos insert in the Rosh Chodesh davening?"

To explain why we recite the unique beracha of Ata Yatzarta, we need first to understand that each korban Musaf reflects something special about that day. An obvious example is the offering of bulls that is incorporated in the korbanos Musaf of the seven days of Sukkos. Over the seven days of Sukkos, we offer seventy bulls as part of the Musaf in a particular order, beginning with thirteen on the first day and decreasing by one each day until we offer seven on Hoshanah Rabbah, the last day of Sukkos. These seventy bulls correspond to the seventy nations of the Earth who descended from Noah. Thus, one theme of Sukkos is that our korbanos service is to benefit not only the Jewish People, but is for the sake of the world and its entire population.

One unusual goat

The vast majority of korbanos offered as part of the Musaf are korbanos olah, which, Rav Hirsch explains, are to assist in our developing greater alacrity in observing Hashem's commandments (Commentary to Shemos 27:8). In addition to the many korbanos olah offered as part of the Musaf of Rosh Chodesh and of all Yomim Tovim, there is also always one goat offered as a korban chatas. A chatas is usually translated as a "sin offering" and, indeed, in most instances, its purpose is to atone for specific misdeeds. The offering of a korban chatas on every Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh provides specific atonement on that day that we cannot accomplish on an ordinary weekday (see Mishnah, Shevuos 2a; also see Vayikra 17:10 and Rashi ad loc.).

The Shabbos Musaf

However, the Musaf offering for Shabbos contains no korban chatas. As a matter of fact, Shabbos is the only special day mentioned by the Torah on which a korban chatas is not offered. Clearly, the purpose of Shabbos is not to atone, but to commemorate the fact that Hashem created the entire world in the six days of Creation and then stepped back. Thus, observing Shabbos is our acknowledgement of Hashem as Creator of the Universe, but the discussion of sin and its atonement is not part of the role of Shabbos.

Uniqueness of Rosh Chodesh

The celebration and role of Rosh Chodesh in our calendar is different from Shabbos or any of the Yomim Tovim. The monthly waning and waxing of the moon that Rosh Chodesh commemorates symbolizes that people occasionally wane and wax in their service of Hashem (Rav Hirsch's Commentary to Shemos 12:1-2). Although we sometimes falter or are not as devoted to serving Hashem as we should be, we always can and do return to serve Him. Rosh Chodesh is celebrated at the first glimmer after the disappearance of the moon, after one might lose all hope. The reappearance of the first sliver of the new moon brings hope that, just as the moon renews itself, so, too, we can renew our relationship with Hashem. The chatas offering of Rosh Chodesh, therefore, allows atonement for our shortcomings of the past month, and, at the same time, reminds us to focus on our mission as Hashem's Chosen People.

#### Uniqueness of the Rosh Chodesh Korban Musaf

While the Musaf of each of the Yomim Tovim also includes a korban chatas, and each Yom Tov therefore includes a concept of judgment and atonement (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 16a; Mishnah, Shevuos 2a), the Torah's description of the korban chatas of Rosh Chodesh differs from its description of the korbanos chatas that is offered on the other Yomim Tovim. The chata'os of the other Yomim Tovim are always mentioned immediately after the other Musaf offerings of the day. However, when the Torah teaches about the Musaf of Rosh Chodesh, the Torah first lists the other Musaf offerings, then sums up with the statement, Zos olas chodesh bechodesh lechodshei hashanah, "these are the olah offerings of Rosh Chodesh for all the months of the year," as if it has completed the discussion of the Musaf for Rosh Chodesh. Only then does the Torah mention the chatas offering, implying that the chatas of Rosh Chodesh fulfills a unique purpose – almost as if it stands alone.

More significantly, the wording of the chatas of Rosh Chodesh is different from that of the other chatas offerings. Whereas in reference to all the chata'os of Yom Tov the Torah simply says that one should offer a chatas, on Rosh Chodesh the Torah says that one should offer a chatas to Hashem.

The Gemara itself notes this last question and provides a very anomalous answer: Hashem said, this goat is atonement for My decreasing the size of the moon (Shevuos 9a). From here, Chazal derive that the sun and moon were originally created equal in size, and that later Hashem decreased the size of the moon.

This statement sounds sacrilegious – how can one imply that something Hashem did requires atonement?

Indeed, I have seen commentaries say that the explanation of this Gemara is kabbalistic and should be left for those who understand these ideas. Others explain that the korban that the Jews offer on Rosh Chodesh appeases the moon for its stature being decreased (Ritva, Shevuos 9a). What does this mean?

#### Man's relationship with G-d

This could be understood in the following way: Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Bamidbar 28) explains that the "atonement for decreasing the moon" means that Hashem created man with the ability to sin, and thereby he can create evil and darkness. For, after all, sins committed by human beings are the only evil in the world. Thus, someone might "accuse" Hashem of creating evil, by creating man with the ability to sin. This can be called "decreasing the size of the moon," since the moon's waning and waxing carries with it the meaning of the waning and waxing of the relationship of man to Hashem.

The message of the chatas of Rosh Chodesh, then, is that man can return to serve Hashem, and that, on the contrary, this was the entire purpose of Creation. In error, someone might have accused Hashem of having brought sin into the world, and therefore decreasing the moon. In reality, man's serving Hashem is the only true praise to Him. The offering of the korban chatas on Rosh Chodesh demonstrates this. Indeed, man is fallible, but when fallible man serves Hashem this demonstrates the truest praise in the world for Him.

#### Why Rosh Chodesh is not Yom Tov

According to a Midrash, prior to the debacle of the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf, the eigel hazahav, Rosh Chodesh was to have been

made into a Yom Tov. Unfortunately, when the Jews worshipped the eigel hazahav, this Yom Tov was taken from them and presented exclusively to the women, who had not worshipped the eigel (Tur, Orach Chayim 417, and Mahalnach commentary ad loc.). The sin of the eigel hazahav demonstrates how low man can fall. This is symbolically represented by the decrease of the moon. As a result of this sin, Rosh Chodesh could not become a Yom Tov, but had to remain a workday.

However, when Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh coincide, no melacha is performed on Rosh Chodesh, so that it can now achieve what it would have accomplished as a Yom Tov. This is the goal of a Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, and for this reason, we include a Yom Tov aspect to our davening.

And not only does Shabbos increase the sanctity of Rosh Chodesh, but Rosh Chodesh increases the sanctity of Shabbos. The Gemara conveys this idea by declaring that the korban Musaf of Shabbos has more sanctity when Shabbos falls on Rosh Chodesh (Zevachim 91a).

The significance of this unusual beracha

Shabbos is our acknowledgement of Hashem as Creator of the Universe, whereas Rosh Chodesh demonstrates the role of mankind as the purpose of the Creation of this world. Since man is the only creation capable of sinning, he is the only one able to make a conscious choice to serve his Maker.

Based on this, we can understand why the coming of Shabbos, which demonstrates the Creation of the universe, together with Rosh Chodesh, which demonstrates man's role in Creation warrants a special beracha and a special declaration -- Ata Yatzarta, You created the world.

<https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/item/2486/essay-parshas-korach-where-others-saw-the-end-he-saw-the-beginning?print=1>

#### Rabbi YY Jacobson

#### Where Others Saw the End, He Saw the Beginning In Tribute to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for His 30th Yartzeit

Jason Bullard

#### 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, whereas 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 30th yartzeit is this coming Tuesday, the third of Tammuz, July 9. The Rebbe, and 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, 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-mentation.” 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.

Who was the Rebbe? One way to answer this question is this: He has that unique ability to see crisis as opportunity. Where others saw the end, he saw the beginning. Where others saw disintegration, he saw the potential for birthing. It remains one of the most empowering messages for each of us as an individual, and all of us as a collective.

#### 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 a 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?

Rabbi Berel Baumgarten (d. in 1978) was a Jewish educator in an orthodox religious yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY, before 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 of 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 without 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 was sending him to an ancient text...

I opened an Avos Derabi Noson to that particular chapter and found a story 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 ask 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. Credit to the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks for his masterful elaboration.

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## Drasha

### By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Korach

Internal Combustion

"Any quarrel," says the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:20) "that is made for the sake of heaven shall, in conclusion, last. However, if the argument has selfish motivation it shall not last." The Mishnah offers Hillel and Shamai as an example of heavenly opponents. Their arguments will last forever.

On the other hand, Korach and his congregation are the examples given for those whose debate stemmed from egotistical motivations. "Those types of disputes," says the Mishnah, "are doomed to fail."

The Mishnah, is of course referring to the episode in this week's portion. Korach, a first cousin of Moshe, contested the priesthood. He gathered 250 followers, formed a congregation, and openly rebelled against Moshe and Ahron, claiming that Moshe and his brother underhandedly seized both temporal and spiritual leadership. Moshe, in his great humility, offered a solution in which divine intercession would point to the true leader. Korach and his followers were swallowed alive by a miraculous variation of an earthquake.

Yet two questions occur on the Mishnah. By using the expression that, "an argument for the sake of heaven will last," it seems to show that an ongoing argument is a proof of its sanctity. Shouldn't it be the opposite? The other anomaly is that in referring to the kosher argument, the Mishnah refers to the combatants, Hillel and Shamai. Each was on one side of the debate. Yet, in reference to the argument that is labeled as egotistical, it defines the combatants as Korach and his congregation.

Weren't the combatants Korach and Moshe? Why is the latter part of the Mishnah inconsistent with the former?

On the week following Passover 1985, I began my first pulpit in an old small shul in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The scent of herring juice permeated the building, and the benches did not creak as they swayed, they krektsed. As old as the furnishings were, the membership was older. But the Congregation's spirit of tradition was feistier than its physical appearance.

My first week, I was asked to bless the new month of Iyar, Mevarchim HaChodesh. Then the trouble began. Every Shabbos, a somber prayer, Av HaRachamim, which memorializes Jewish martyrs during the era of the crusades is recited. On holidays or other festive occasions such as Shabbos Mevarchim, in deference to the spirit of celebration, the prayer is omitted. However, the month of Iyar is considered a sad time for Jews. 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished in that period. Many congregations recite Av HaRachamim on Shabbos Mevarchim for the month of Iyar. I assumed my new congregation did the same and began reciting, "Av HaRachamim." Immediately I heard a shout, and an uproar began.

"We don't say Av HaRachamim today. We just blessed the new month," announced the President.

"We say it this month! It's sefirah, a period of mourning," yelled back the Vice-President.

"You know nothin'. We never ever say it when we bench (bless) Rosh Chodesh," yelled the Treasurer.

"We always did!" asserted the Gabbai.

The argument was brewing for five minutes when they all began to smile and instructed me to say the prayer as I had planned. Before I continued the service I sauntered over to the old Shammash who was sitting quietly through the tumult and asked, "what is the minhag (custom) of this shul?"

He surveyed the scene and beamed. "This shul is 100 years old. This is our minhag."

The Mishnah gives us a litmus test. How does one know when there is validity to an argument? Only when it is an argument that envelops eternity. The arguments of Shamai and Hillel last until today, in the halls and classrooms of Yeshivos and synagogues across the world. Each one's view was not given for his own personal gain, it was argued for the sake of heaven. However, Korach's battle with Moshe was one of personal gain. Moshe had no issue with them. It was a battle of Korach and his cohorts. Each with a completely different motivation — himself. It did not last. A battle with divine intent remains eternal. In a healthy environment there is room for healthy differences. And those differences will wax eternal.

Dedicated in honor of the anniversary of Joel & Robbie Martz by Mr. and Mrs. Perry Davis

Mordechai Kamenetzky – Yeshiva of South Shore  
Good Shabbos

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## Parsha Insights

### By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Korach

Earth-Shattering Occurrences

This week we read the parsha of Korach. "Va'yikach Korach ben Yitzhar ben K'has... v'Dasan va'Aviram... v'On ben Peles... vayakumu lifnei Moshe (And Korach the son of Yitzhar the son of K'has took and Dasan and Aviram and On the son of Peles and they stood before Moshe) [16:1-2]." This first pasuk (verse) seems somewhat strange — it doesn't tell us what he took!

Rashi explains the words "Va'yikach Korach" not to mean 'and Korach took' but rather, that 'he took Korach'. Who took Korach? Korach did. He took himself. He removed himself from being part of the group of Klal Yisroel and he stood before Moshe to contend with him.

What was bothering Korach? He was jealous of the positions of honor that Moshe had given to others. In order to understand this, we need to have some family background. K'has, Korach's grandfather was one of Levi's three sons. He in turn had four sons of his own. Amram, his eldest, gave birth to Moshe and Aharon. Yitzhar, the second, was the father of Korach. His third and fourth sons were Chevron and Uziel.

Korach was jealous that the position of Kohen gadol (high Priest) had been given to Aharon and not to him. However, he couldn't rightfully contest that appointment. Aharon's father was Amram, the b'chor (firstborn). His father was Yitzhar, the second son. Aharon clearly had precedence over him. He bore this jealousy quietly until he felt that he had valid grounds to contest an appointment made by Moshe. At that point, he tried to contest all of the appointments that Moshe had made.

His opportunity came during our second year out of Mitzraim (Egypt). Moshe, as directed by Hashem, had appointed Elitzafon, the son of Uziel, K'has' youngest son, to be the Nasi (leader) of the K'has family. At that point Korach exploded. "My father was one of four brothers. Amram, the eldest, his two sons took positions of leadership. Moshe, you are the king and your brother Aharon is the Kohen gadol. Who should be the Nasi? I, Korach, the son of the second son, Yitzhar. I deserve to be the Nasi. And you went and appointed Elitzafon, the son of the youngest brother, to be Nasi?! I don't accept the validity of any of your appointments!"

We discussed last week how the lust for honor blinds a person's perception. This week we see the disastrous effects of jealousy. As a single grain of sand shuts down the effectiveness of the whole eye, even a tinge of jealousy brings an intellectual blindness to the way we perceive a situation.

"Is it a small thing that Hashem has separated you from the rest of Yisroel to serve in the Mishkan (as Levites)? [16:9]", Moshe said to them. Every person is unique, with unique contributions to make to this world. Each individual is given what is necessary in order to make those contributions. I have what I need and I need what I have. When the world is viewed in such a way, there is no place for jealousy.

My oldest son is graduating elementary school this year. I attended a meeting with the Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of a local Yeshiva high school. He discussed how he loathes when parents asks how their son is doing relative to the rest of the class. The question must be how the child is doing relative to himself...

People spend so much time and energy thinking 'what will be if', when that same time and energy would be much more effectively focused toward 'what can I best do with what I have'. My wife and I are blessed with six children, first five boys and then a girl. At times when the house can get a bit hectic, we envisage how much quiet time we'll have to spend together when the children all get older. We very quickly catch ourselves and remind each other that at that time, we'll sit and reminisce how great and exciting it was with all of the kids around.

The Yeshiva where I teach just ended its academic year. Toward the end, many boys find it hard to apply themselves as they're so excited about returning home after having been in Israel for the year. I try to remind them that when they're back home, they'll be reminiscing about how great it was being in Yeshiva and having all of the guys around. The time here is spent thinking about being there, and the time there is spent thinking about being here...

In the Mishna (Avos 2:17) Rabi Yosi teaches: the property of your friend should be as dear to you as your own. Besides the obvious message, there are those who learn an additional point. His property should be as dear to you as your own but not more dear! So often, when someone else has it, it seems so great. I must have the same thing. Once we do have it, it seems to lose its luster. His property should be as dear as our own and our own as dear as his. We must appreciate what we have and where we are.

The story is told of a stonecutter who would hew stones from the mountain. "Ping, ping", was the sound of his pick against the hard stone. "Why must I break my back to feed myself and my family?", he would bemoan his fate. "Others have such an easy life and for me it's so hard." One day, as he was perched on the mountain, hammering his pick into its crevices, he heard a loud commotion coming from down below. The king and his entourage were passing by and a throng of people had gathered to see their king. The king looked so splendid in his royal robes, sitting in the royal coach drawn by elegant white horses.

"I wish I was the king", mused the stonecutter, and ~poof~ he suddenly found himself sitting in the royal coach with crowds of admirers straining to get a look at him. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the king, the most powerful in all of the world!", he thought.

After a while he started to feel very uncomfortable. The sun was beating down on him and his royal polyester outfit. Being king was starting to lose its luster. He realized that the king was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the king was powerless before the sun.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the sun", he thought, and ~poof~ he was radiating light and warmth to the entire world. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the sun, the most powerful in all of the world."

He sat there majestically, directed his rays here and there at will. Suddenly, a group of clouds moved beneath him, obstructing his light. He focused his energy as hard as he could, but he couldn't pierce the clouds. He realized that the sun was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the sun was powerless before the clouds.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the clouds", he thought, and ~poof~ he was dumping rain wherever he wished, haughtily

blocking the sun's rays. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the clouds, the most powerful in all of the world."

He floated about enjoying the view when suddenly, he found himself being blown by a strong gust of wind. He quickly realized that he was no longer in control and was at the mercy of the wind. The clouds were not as powerful as he had thought. Even the clouds were powerless before the winds.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the wind", he thought, and ~poof~ he was churning waves in the ocean and blowing off hats in the city. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the wind, the most powerful in all of the world."

He flew and blew at will — nothing stood in his way — and felt his awesome power. Suddenly, he came across a mountain. Try as he might, he had to go around the mountain — it could not be moved. The wind was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the wind was powerless before the mountain.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the mountain", he thought, and ~poof~ he stood majestically with his peak transcending the clouds. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the mountain, the most powerful in all of the world."

As he sat there in his splendor, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his shoulder. "Ping, ping", was the sound of the stonecutter's pick against his stone. The pain was unbearable. The mountain was not as powerful as he had thought. It stood powerless before the stonecutter.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be a stonecutter", he thought, and ~poof~ he was perched on the mountain, hammering his pick into its crevices...

Good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

This is dedicated to the memory and z'chus (merit) of my sister, Devorah Pesel bas Asher Chaim, a"h, whose yahrtzeit was the thirtieth of Sivan. Though it is beyond our comprehension, she in her short lifetime accomplished what she needed to accomplish. At that exact moment, her neshama (soul) returned to its true place.

### Blood libels, then and now

**Medieval antisemites believed awful things about Jews and that gave them license to do awful things to Jews. The same is true today.**  
**Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz**

Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz is the Senior Rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York.

This past Wednesday was the 20th of Sivan, which was once a fast day that commemorated the first violent blood libel. (The Vaad Arba Aratzot later redesignated it to commemorate the Cossack massacres of 1648-1649.)

In 1144, 12-year-old William of Norwich was found murdered. In 1149, a Knight named Simon, on trial for murdering Eleazar, a wealthy Jew to whom he owed money, claimed in his defense that Eleazar and the Jewish community had murdered William as an act of ritual murder. The defense won the case.

A local monk, Thomas of Monmouth, then published a book about the supposed "murder" of William of Norwich. He claimed that Jews engage in the ritual murder of Christian children in order to return to Israel. He wrote:

"As a proof of the truth and credibility of the matter we now adduce something which we have heard from the lips of Theobald, who was once a Jew and afterwards a monk. He verily told us that in the ancient writings of his fathers, it was written that the Jews, without the shedding of human blood, could neither obtain their freedom nor could they ever return to their fatherland. Hence it was laid down by them in ancient times that every year they must sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in scorn and contempt of Christ so they might avenge their sufferings on Him; inasmuch as it was because of Christ's death that they had been shut out from their own country and were in exile as slaves in a foreign land."

Thomas of Monmouth's blood libel circulated through Europe for nearly two decades. Then, in 1171, it became deadly. In Blois, France, a Jew

and a Christian brought their horses to drink from the river. The Jew dropped an untanned hide and the horse of the Christian jumped. The Christian then claimed that the Jew had dropped a murdered baby into the river.

Count Thibault, the local ruler (and brother-in-law of the French King Louis VII) claimed that the Jewish community had committed a ritual murder. The judicial proceedings, which were based on a bizarre trial by ordeal, found the Jews guilty, even without a body or an alleged victim. And 32 Jews were burned at the stake.

Rabbeinu Yaakov Tam, the great rabbinic leader and grandson of Rashi, then declared the 20th of Sivan a fast day. (He was 71 at the time and died a few weeks later.)

Declaring a new fast for the murdered in Blois was a major statement. No fast had been declared for the First and Second Crusades, which resulted in thousands of deaths. Rabbeinu Tam himself nearly died in the Second Crusade, but he realized that what happened in Blois was even worse. He recognized that the blood libel was a lethal form of propaganda and would cause centuries of trouble. And he was right.

E.M. Rose wrote an exceptional book on this topic, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*. She explained that the blood libel was unique in several ways.

First, it was a theory that originated and was embraced among the educated elite, not just the unwashed masses. She wrote: "This supposed 'irrational,' 'bizarre,' 'literary trope' was the product of lucid, cogent arguments, thoughtfully and carefully debated in executive councils, judged in detail by sober men who were not reacting under pressure to thoughtless mob violence."

The original blood libel started with the intelligentsia and became well-accepted.

A second element she points out is that the blood libel put every Jew on trial: "Jewish identity was on trial, rather than any single individual perpetrator."

Every Jew was guilty until proven innocent.

The 20th of Sivan is sadly once again an important date in 2024. Once again, Israel is guilty until proven innocent. Even a hostage rescue is immediately treated as a wanton massacre of innocent civilians until Israel provides video evidence to the contrary.

Once again, leading the charge against Israel are some well-educated people—professors and students at elite universities who, in their hatred of Israel, are eager to support a group of fanatical, depraved murderers. And like Thomas of Monmouth, the testimony of individual Jews, no matter how tainted, is taken to support horrific falsehoods.

## **Korach One word says it all.**

### **Chief Rabbi Mirvis**

Every single word of our Torah is sacred, and they all impart such beautiful, enduring messages.

But, so very often, the very beginning of a Parsha, imparts to us a crucial lesson for life – and this is so true of Parshat Korach.

The opening word of Korach actually encapsulates the whole reason why everything went wrong.

What is that opening word? 'Vayikach' – 'he (Korach) took'. What it means in that context is that Korach took himself aside, he separated himself from others and he contended with Moshe and Aharon, challenging their leadership.

This led to a split in the nation. It was horrific. It was tantamount to a brief civil war and as a result, Korach and his followers suffered an awful death. But what was at the root of this machloket, this conflict?

For Korach it wasn't a 'machloket L'shem Shamayim' – it was not for the sake of heaven, it was for the sake of himself. 'Vayikach' – he wanted to take power, importance, yichus, significance, wealth.

It was all self-serving, not a single element of his leadership had the welfare or the future of the nation in mind. I think it happens quite often that leaders of all sorts have big egos.

It shouldn't really be the case, but even where there's a big ego, one still needs to be in a position of authority and leadership, for the sake of

those whom one is serving. In the event that there is a leader, who is in their position exclusively for their own sake – not only will the leader be in trouble, but the entire people will be. Shabbat Shalom.

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## **Korach: Separating and Connecting**

### **Rav Kook Torah**

"The entire congregation is holy, and God is with them. Why do you raise yourselves over God's community?" (Num. 16:3)

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

Why indeed should only the Levites and the kohanim serve in the Temple? Why not open up the service of God to the entire nation?

#### **Havdalah and Chibur**

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Separation in Order to Connect**

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

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

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

#### **The Correct Order**

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

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

The correct path, the path of holiness, follows the order of first separating and then connecting. In other words, the separation is for the sake of connection. But Korach's philosophy (and similar ideologies,

such as communism) took the opposite approach. He sought a simplistic inclusiveness of all, binding all people into one uniform group from the outset. He boastfully claimed to unite all together — “The entire congregation is holy.” This approach, however, replaces the splendor of diversity with dull uniformity. In the end, this totalitarian approach leads to disunity, as all parts yearn to break apart in order to express their unique individuality. “The Sitra Achra begins with chibur and ends with pirud.”

## DON'T LET THEM SUFFER IN SILENCE: PTSD AND THE IDF BY RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG

Visits to Israel used to be highlighted by sitting at the Kotel, going on tiyulim up north, shopping in the shuk, and eating shwarma throughout the country. For my past five visits since Simchas Torah, however, they have included something I had never done before: spending time at Tel HaShomer hospital visiting injured soldiers. Each time, we came to give chizuk, the bring good and positive energy, gifts, love, support, and boundless gratitude. Each time we left having in fact received the chizuk, in awe of young men missing limbs, battling wounds, forming what will be everlasting scars.

On my trip to Israel this week I visited Tel HaShomer again, but this time to a unit I hadn't been to previously and to visit soldiers with injuries that while certainly severe, are altogether different from what I had previously seen. Indeed, they are not visible at all.

In addition to IDF soldiers in my family and our community, I have developed a relationship with several heroic soldiers over our visits the last nine months. A reservist who was full of life, energy, love, tenacity and faith when I met him, someone I have sung and danced with on his base, called me to say he is suffering and struggling. For the last couple of months, he has been crying and sobbing uncontrollably, having panic attacks, and feels filled with uncharacteristic anger and rage. He hasn't slept or eaten properly. He is struggling at work and in his personal life. At the bris of his son, as he held the baby, he was suddenly transported back to his duties at the very beginning of the war and was shaken by the feeling that he was holding a dead body rather than his living newborn son.

I visited him at Tel HaShomer where he had been admitted to the psychiatric ward with a diagnosis of PTSD. Once known as Shell Shock, Soldier's Heart or Battle Fatigue, the condition we now know as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) affects countless veterans of war. When I saw him, he was a shell of himself, a shadow of the person I first met. He was in pain from his condition, but he was also suffering from deep shame and embarrassment. He hadn't shared with others, including those with whom he is very close, where he was or why. The unit he is in is filled with soldiers suffering with PTSD, most of whom battle it with shame and embarrassment. Many have turned to alcohol or drugs to numb them from the pain and emptiness. PTSD impacts not only the one diagnosed with it but their spouse, children, and entire family.

I asked him, if you God forbid had an injury to a limb or organ, if in this war you were shot, or physically wounded, would you keep it to yourself? Would there be any shame or disgrace associated with your hospitalization or recovery? You would be a gibor, a hero of our people, deserving of endless support and boundless gratitude.

Why should it be any different just because your wounds are invisible to the naked eye? They are no more your fault, no more a source of shame, no less deserving of love, support, care, and recognition. Don't feel obligated to share or tell others, I told him, but if you would benefit from love and support and the only reason you are keeping it to yourself is fear of stigma, I beg you to reconsider. He told me that unfortunately, it is simply not the way others see it for now and so he feels has no choice but to do it this way.

I called his wife, whom we have come to know as well. She is home caring for their young children by herself. I begged, let me arrange with

your community to provide meals, to help with childcare, to be a source of support during his recovery from an injury sustained while fighting in the Jewish people's war. Isn't that exactly what we would do if a heroic soldier was physically injured, recuperating in the hospital and the family needed help? She appreciated the concern but said that sadly, that isn't the way others see it and so she has no choice but to deal with this privately.

My heart broke not only from what they are going through in dealing with his trauma, injury, and wounds but how their pain and agony is compounded by the loneliness with which they are experiencing it.

My young friends are far from alone. In the two months following October 7, an alarming 8,000 soldiers reported experiencing trauma. Recently, researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Columbia University, Shalvata Mental Health Center in Hod Hasharon, and the Effective Altruism organization, published a study that predicts that 520,000 — or 5.3 percent of the Israeli population — could develop PTSD as a result of October 7 and Israel's ongoing war.

Prof. Yair Bar-Haim, head of the National Center for Traumatic Stress and Resilience at Tel Aviv University, believes a more realistic number is 30,000 new cases of PTSD among Israelis as a result of the October 7 terror attacks and the war.

Historically, Israeli soldiers have much lower rates of PTSD than other countries. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 30 percent of Vietnam veterans have had PTSD at some point in their lifetime. As much as 20 percent of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom have PTSD. A variety of reasons have been suggested such as Israel having a civilian army, the whole country being exposed to terror, the visibility of soldiers in society regularly, and more.

Whatever the true number of PTSD cases in Israel as a result of October 7 and the war, it is startling and is going to need tremendous treatment and support. The Jewish community responded swiftly and generously to help our heroic soldiers with equipment and supplies when the war began. But what will be needed next can't get packed in a duffle bag and doesn't get served at a barbecue.

In Israel and abroad we must recognize that invisible injuries are just as real as physical ones. We must work to eliminate the stigma of mental and emotional illness and to create a culture and condition in which there is no shame or embarrassment and in which the community responds with love and support.

My friend in Tel HaShomer shared with me: “A person like me suffering from PTSD doesn't want people to look at them and treat them with pity and doesn't want them asking all the time how I am and why I look upset or why I am not smiling. Just understand that they are going through a hard time and be there if they need.”

Paid leave must be granted from work for those recovering from PTSD or mental illness, just as they would for those physically injured. Meals, childcare, financial help must be given for those with invisible wounds, just like they would for the family of a physically wounded soldier. Massive contributions must be collected to provide treatment and support for those recovering from PTSD. The names of soldiers and civilians struggling with PTSD or mental illness should without shame or stigma be included on Tehillim lists and added to MiShebeirachs. And people must be sensitive to this very real condition, and not minimize it by using the term to describe what it feels like when they were stuck in traffic or when Starbucks messed up their order.

As Israel is still fighting the longest war in its history, the risk of fatigue setting in is real and concerning. When it comes to the mental health and wellness of our soldiers and brothers and sisters, we may just be at the beginning. May my dear friend whom I truly love, together with all those needing physical, mental and emotional refuah shleimas, have a speedy, painless and complete recovery.

בְּנֵי לִיבָּעָה  
אֲנָא מֶלֶכה בְּתִ יִשְׂרָאֵל

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since Datan & Aviram did not come to the "ktoret" test, we must conclude that their "mishkan" must be located in the area of the Tribe of 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?

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Before reading this question, which 'mateh' did you think

Moshe used to hit the rock at "mei m'riva"?

Now look carefully at 20:8-11.

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

## **"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