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

Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l. Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohen, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her. Iran's family and friends will honor her at Magen David on the first anniversary of her burial, 7 Tammuz. May Iran's name and memory always be for a blessing in our community.

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

The final story that the Torah records about the generation of the Exodus is Korach's rebellion against Aharon's leadership of the Kohanim. The Torah combines this story with a second rebellion, B'nai Reuven protesting Levi taking over religious and political leadership that would traditionally have been a perk of the first born. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's shiur, which I attach by E-mail, sorts out these two rebellions.

Rabbi David Fohrman and some of his colleagues explain that Korach received exactly what he had requested from his role in the rebellion. The Torah introduces Korach's family and its role concerning the Mishkan (earlier in Sefer Bemidbar) as: "Naso et Rosh B'nai Kehat. . ." (4:2). One meaning of "Naso" is "raise up," so one can read this instruction as God telling Moshe to "raise up the head of the sons of Kehat." Korach was a son of Kehat, from the tribe of Levi. God raised up the family of Kehat by giving the men of that family the most important (and most dangerous) role of any of the tribe of Levi – carrying the holy vessels of the Mishkan whenever the camp moved. When Korach came to his cousins Moshe and Aharon to complain that they took the most important tasks, Moshe was amazed, because Korach's family had the most significant tasks of any branch of Levi.

Whenever it was time for B'nai Yisrael to move, Kohanim had to cover the holy vessels in blue bags (techelet) – because if anyone but a Kohen touched one of the vessels, he would immediately die. The Torah uses the word "kevlat" for covering – but that word also means "swallow." The Kohanim swallow the holy vessels in all blue bags (techelet) to assure that the members of Kehat (Korach's family) would not die when they took possession and carried the vessels to the next stopping place. The Torah calls the holy vessels "Kodesh."

When Korach came to Moshe and Aharon, he stated that all the Jews were Kodesh. Moshe suggested a test, that Aharon and Korach's men would all bring fire pans and incense to see whose fire and incense God would select. Following God's warning, Moshe told everyone on God's side to move away from the rebels. Those who remained were swallowed up when the earth moved apart to create a hole and then covered back after swallowing the rebels.

According to Midrash, Korach took his men to Moshe, all dressed in garments made entirely of techelet (all blue), and asked him if all blue garments needed tzitzit. Where did Korach obtain all the blue cloth? From the coverings used to swallow the Kodesh, the holy vessels of the Mishkan. The techelet swallows up the Kodesh from the Mishkan, and similarly, when Korach claimed that he and his rebels were Kodesh, the earth swallowed them, while they were wearing

their outfits of techelet. This well known Midrash explores the implications of “naso” meaning “to raise up” and “kevlat” meaning “to swallow” to show how Korach set up his rebels for the earth to swallow them.

Ami Silver, from Rabbi Fohrman’s group of Torah scholars, concludes that Korach’s problem was focusing exclusively on what he did not have rather than finding the importance in his role. (Moshe, with better insight, found Korach’s misguided self perception astounding.) Korach’s story should teach us to find value and satisfaction in who we are and what we accomplish, while we still try to learn and grow as Jews and humans. Sefer Bemidbar explores the vast potential and sad failings of an entire generation of our ancestors. Korach was a leader of an important family, and his sons wrote some distinguished Tehillim. One of his descendants was the prophet Shmuel (Samuel).

I wrote the last two weeks about signs of depression among the Jews who sought reasons to kvetch as they left the base of Har Sinai, on their way to the promised land, and then among many of the people after they received the majority report of the Meraglim. Korach’s dissatisfaction with his leading position among his generation of Levi may also be a sign of depression.

With Korach, the Torah tells us no more about the generation of the Exodus. The Torah presents Chukat (ch. 20), the procedure for re-establishing ritual purity after contact with a dead body. With no transition, the Torah resumes immediately with the story of the 40th year (ch. 21) and the next generation, those who finally deserved to enter the land that God so much wanted to give to B’Nai Yisrael.

The coming week marks four significant yahrtzeits for our family. This Sunday evening, 3 Tammuz, is the 27th yahrtzeit of the Lubavitch Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory. Monday evening, 4 Tammuz, is the yahrtzeit of Leonid Alper, z”l, beloved grandfather of the family that we adopted in 1989 when they escaped from the former Soviet Union. Four Tammuz is also the yahrtzeit of Iran Kohan-Sedge, a”h, an extraordinary member of the Potomac community, cherished wife, mother, teacher, and friend to many in our community (see dedication on page 1). My beloved grandfather, David Fisher, z”l, passed away shortly after my 21st birthday, on 8 Tammuz. Whenever I have a string of yahrtzeits, I always feel close to my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, my very close friend and Rebbe for nearly 50 years. Remembering these beloved members of a deceased generation fits in with saying good-bye to the generation of the Exodus as the Torah completes its discussion of their history.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Korach: Grinding the Point

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

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

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

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

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

It always bothered me. The opening of the earth is no little feat. Earthquakes of that magnitude did not occur at a moment's notice! Wasn't that event powerful enough to make the point? Why was there a need to quell the whining and punish the perpetrators with such powerful punishments and magnificent miracles? Shouldn't a heavenly warning have been enough?

Rabbi Meshulm Igra of Pressburg was one of Europe's leading scholars in the latter part of the 18th century. As a young man, he was engaged to the daughter of a prominent community leader in the city of Butzatz. A few months before the wedding the young chosson ate a meal at the home of his future father-in-law. Dessert was served together with a hot treat a delecicy that the impoverished Reb Meshulam had never heard of — coffee.

The servant brought out a cup of brewed coffee together with sugar and milk. The prospective father-in-law directed his son in law to partake. The young scholar looked quizzically at each of the entities and began to ponder. There were two liquids and sugar. The Talmud teaches that eating preceeds drinking. He took a sppon of sugar and ate it. Then he was unsure what to drink first the milk or the black brew. Noting that darkness in the Torah comes before day, he drank the black coffee. Noticing the grinds at the bottom of the cup, he took his spoon and began to eat them. Not wanting to embarrass his soon-to-be father-in-law who had served such a difficult-to-eat dessert, he slowly chewed and swallowed the grinds. His prospective bride stood in shock.

"Father," she cried "I cannot marry a man who does not know how do drink a cup of coffee. He is a total klutz!" The engagement was broken.

Years later this same community leader visited the home of Rav Yeshaya Pick the prominent Rav of Breslow. Upon entering the study he noticed the rav engrossed in a letter. He looked totally concerned and distraught. When the man asked what problem was, Rabbi Pick told him that he just received a letter that is filled with the deepest insights. "I have to be totally immersed in Torah thought to begin to comprehend the level of this man's

brilliance. In fact," he continued, "I do not think a man of this caliber has emerged in the last fifty years! And," he added, "besides the brilliance, one can note his amazing humility and fine character throughout every word he writes."

Then he looked up at the man. "You come from Butzatz. Have you ever hear of a man called Meshulam Igra?"

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

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

Then he looked at the man and simply declared, "Faint again!"

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

Good Shabbos

Two Faces of Kedusha

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

The Torah emphasizes time and again that the Jewish people are holy. At their birth as a covenantal people at Mt. Sinai, God declares, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). In the beginning of Parshat Kedoshim, framing chapters dense with mitzvot, we read, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). The concept of holiness in these contexts is not fully clear. Does it mean that we are intrinsically better than everyone else?

Korach certainly thought so. Korach, together with his followers, confronted Moses with the challenge of holiness: "You have gone too far!," they accused him, "for all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD's congregation?" (Numbers 16:3). Korach's attack was simple: If we are holy, then we are all equal, and if we are all equal, why should you, Moses, possess the mantle of leadership more than anyone else? For Korach, holiness was a status, a privilege, and an entitlement. His claim went beyond the issue of equality: Holiness was a right to lead. If I am holy, then I also have the status that entitles me to lead.

Of course, the question begs itself: If the whole nation is holy, then doesn't everyone, and not just Korach, have a right to lead? Well, yes. But Korach was a demagogue who was attempting to use a populist claim that would serve to propel him alone to power.

Korach's invocation of holiness went beyond this cynical use; it betrayed an oftentimes self-serving concept of what holiness is. Korach's claim that holiness was a status of privilege and entitlement was coupled with his understanding that it was something that was already possessed by him and the people. For him, holiness was a state of being. We don't have to work for it; that's just what we are.

In the Torah, however, the people are not told that they are already holy, but rather that they must strive for holiness. In this framework, holiness is a state of becoming, not of being.

“You shall be unto Me a holy nation.” The words “you shall” are not descriptive but prescriptive, a call to action. “If you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant,” God exhorted us at Sinai, “then you shall become holy.” In the book of Leviticus, when God declares, “You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy,” we find the same verb: “shall become,” not “already are.” The context there makes it clear that, once again, holiness is something to strive for, something achieved by reaching to be like God and by doing the mitzvot.

This mistaken understanding–or is it an intentional misuse?–of Korach as to the nature of holiness is reflected in his mistaken understanding as to the nature of leadership. For him, leadership meant power and its trappings. The heightened status of a leader was what Korach wanted for himself. Nowhere does he speak of his desire to serve the people or claim that he could do the job better than Moses. His interest lay only in his own advancement, and not in shepherding the people to their next stage of development. Moses, on the other hand, understood that true leadership is not about self-aggrandizement, but about service. At the burning bush, Moses’ response to God choosing him to take the people out of Egypt was “Not me. Anyone but me.” Leadership is a heavy responsibility, and religious leadership comes with duty to God and duty to the people. “Do you think I am giving you lordship?! No! I am giving you service!” (Horiyot 10a-b).

Neither leadership nor holiness are defined by status and benefits, but by sacrifice, service, responsibility, and growth. May we continuously strive to fulfill the injunction to become a holy nation.

Shabbat Shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/06/two-faces-of-kedusha/

When All Else Fails. . .

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

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

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

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

The commentaries explain that originally the sons of Korach were part of the rebellion. As the punishment occurred, they did Teshuva and Hashem saved them.

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

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

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

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

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

But how does one do it? How does one talk to Hashem with sincerity in their moment of need? The answer is: Just do it. Sometimes we are so inhibited that we are not able to get the words out. Still: “Just do it.”

I once read a story in the memoirs of a teacher who one year had her daughter in her class. For the first few months, the daughter was so inhibited by being in her mother’s classroom that she simply sat quietly throughout the period.

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

The other students burst out in surprised but delighted laughter. The “ice was broken” and from then on, the daughter was able to contribute to the classroom discussions.

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

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

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Healthy and Unhealthy Controversy: Thoughts for Parashat Korah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Pirkei Avot describes the controversy of Korah and his cohorts to have been “not for the sake of Heaven.” Their goal was to overthrow the leadership of Moses and Aaron, in the hope of seizing political power for themselves. They did not offer a positive agenda; rather, they preyed on the fears and frustrations of the public.

When controversies are “not for the sake of Heaven” — but rather for the sake of personal gain and egotistical gratification—they are resolved by a show of power. The side which is stronger defeats the opponent; the controversy is over; history continues. These controversies are a zero sum game. One side wins, one side loses.

The Pirkei Avot contrasts the Korah model of controversy with that of the debates between Hillel and Shammai. Those disputes were “for the sake of Heaven.” Neither Hillel nor Shammai was seeking personal power or glory. Each was presenting his interpretation of the Torah and his application of halakha. Each had cogent arguments to support his view. Although they disagreed strongly on various issues, they were not opponents out to destroy each other but were colleagues in search of truth. The Talmud reflects this idea when it states that both of their views “were the words of the living God.” In such debates, a ruling must be reached so that people will know what the law requires. Yet, the “losing” side has not really lost. His opinion is still quoted, still taken seriously. While it did not prevail then, it might prevail at another time or in another context.

Hillel and Shammai ultimately were on the same side — on the side of truth, on the side of Heaven. Their controversies reflected honest and well-reasoned differences of opinion. What they shared in common far outweighed their relatively few differences of opinion.

Just as in antiquity, we have our share of controversies today. Some are clearly in the category of Korah controversies — not for the sake of Heaven. People fight for power, seek to destroy their opponents, give vent to their egotistical ambitions in cruel and ruthless ways. These controversies are resolved through power struggle. The stronger side will win; the weaker side will be wiped out or forced to back down or surrender completely.

We also have controversies that are more akin to those of Hillel and Shammai. As long as the disputants realize they are ultimately on the same side, these controversies can be healthy aspects of our intellectual and cultural lives. We can weigh both sides calmly and reasonably. We can disagree on various points of theology or philosophy, and still remain respectful and friendly to each other.

A problem arises, though, when theological and philosophical debates transform themselves into battles for power that call for the total defeat of opponents. On the surface, these controversies may seem to be "for the sake of Heaven"; yet, they are in fact fueled by egotism and the desire to crush opposition. Disputants in such controversies do not see the opinions of their opponents as being "words of the living God," but as blasphemies that cannot be tolerated in any way. When theological and philosophical disagreements slip into the category of Korah-controversies, this leads to violence and terrorism. Instead of being reflections of a search for truth, they become vehicles for oppression, fueling the overwhelming urge to crush those who dissent.

In his essay, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," Sir Isaiah Berlin dealt with the question of how we deal with theological and philosophical disagreements. He rejected "relativism" which posits that all arguments have equal weight, that everything is a matter of personal choice and preference. No, the categories of truth and falsehood exist. Not every viewpoint has equal legitimacy. Yet, Berlin favored what he called "pluralism", an acceptance that different people might come to legitimate differences of opinion without seeing each other as mortal enemies or opponents. In his view, this pluralism is "the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving light from each other." In other words, I may be convinced that I have the real truth, but I may still see that others — who do not share my understanding of truth—are good, sincere and thoughtful people trying to do their best. I can learn from them, respect them, and be friendly with them. We are disputants — not enemies.

In distinguishing between the Korah-type controversies and the Hillel-Shammai-type controversies, the Pirkei Avot was providing insight on the nature of human conflict. By juxtaposing them, it may have been alluding to the thin line between these two types of controversies. Power struggles can dress themselves up as religious debates; theological and philosophical disputes can be mere camouflages for egotistical and unsavory oppression of opponents.

Perhaps if we can learn to see our conflicts with others in the Hillel-Shammai model, we can develop a more harmonious religious and social discourse. This does not call on us to surrender our notion of truth; but only to recognize that other good, honest and fine people have the right to see things differently than we do. And perhaps if the public at large would adopt the Hillel-Shammai model, this might impact on the politicians, warriors, terrorists and oppressors who follow the Korah-model and who strew so much grief and bloodshed on our world.

Healthy controversy reflects an honest search for truth. Unhealthy controversy reflects the desire for power and ego gratification. Let us be sure that all of our own controversies are for the sake of Heaven.

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

Bringing the Sephardi into a Reset Shoah Narrative

By Arthur Shostak *

Holocaust scholarship is finally making up for nearly eight decades of inadequate attention to the impact of the Shoah (1933 - '45) on approximately 430,000 Sephardi Jews from Europe, Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, and Libya, etc., over 160,000 of whom perished in the catastrophe.

While a few path-setting academic histories came out since 1945 the publication in 2020 of a heartfelt analysis, The Sephardim in the Holocaust: A Forgotten People, by Isaac and Rosemary Levy, raises the bar. It will for decades be regarded as seminal.
The 262-page book draws on more than 170 interviews conducted with Auschwitz survivors in Belgium, Canada, France, Greece, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, the former Yugoslavia, and the United States. We hear from Sephardim in Athens, Corfu, Cos, Macedonia, Rhodes, Salonika, and the former Yugoslavia.

Especially valuable are three features: First, clarification of unique challenges Sephardim faced when in the grips of the Third Reich, as differences in language (24 occupied countries), physical appearance, and Hebrew pronunciation set them apart from the Ashkenazim (the dominant bloc). Second, documentation of brave high-risk secret efforts at revolt in the camps, complicated by the need for Sephardi cooperation with Ashkenazi fellow prisoners. Third, attention to survivors who owe their lives to altruistic sanctuary provided in Albania by Christian and Muslim Upstanders.

Hopefully, the Levy book will soon be followed by new Sephardic-focused scholarship that recognizes there are two stories, not one, that learners ought to take from study of the Shoah: The Horror Story, or what perpetrators did To their victims, AND the Help Story, or what victims did FOR one another.

The well-known first story is unforgivable, while the neglected second story is inspiring, It tells of high-risk secret non-militant efforts made by victims to relieve suffering and increase the survival chances of less fortunate others … even at risk of life. The first story has gotten far more museum wall space than the second, far more library shelf space than the second, far more movie screen coverage than the second, and far more classroom podium and blackboard attention, along with Covid-19 based zoom attention, than the second. This makes the least of memorialization possibilities.

It is past time to think critically about this costly imbalance, and act to remedy it, as it is historically incorrect, grievously misleads, negatively stigmatizes the subject, and explains much of so-called Holocaust Fatigue. The mainstream Narrative needs a constructive reset that would arrest Horror Centrism and advance a new ratio, say, 55/45, Horror/Help, and thereby improve the Legacy and better honor the Six Million (over 160,000 of whom are Sephardic).

To this end I offer the example of my 2017 book, Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust, my website of related short published articles (www.stealthaltruism.com), and my podcast (https://www.practicalreasonpodcast.com/help-story). As well, I offer to assist any reader willing to take this perspective and apply it to the Sephardic Shoah experience.

What was the Sephardic counterpart of the Ashkenazi forest partisan units that in addition to harassing German troops also sheltered young and old Jewish refugees? Who was a Sephardic counterpart for Dr. Janusz Korczak, a world-renowned Polish Jew possibly the greatest child specialist and educational reformer in all of Europe. How did Sephardic communities treat alleged Nazi collaborationists after 1945? How have Sephardic survivors sought to improve Shoah memorialization efforts and the educational transfer of the Legacy, much as do scores of Ashkenazi organizations?

With the rapid coming of an advent in which there are no direct survivors to tell youngsters (and scholars) their story, all of Shoah memorialization is at risk. The sooner Ashkenazi and Sephardic join hands, hearts, and minds in a creative effort to reset and thereby rehabilitate the Narrative, the better off will be Jewry, Judaism, and thereby, humanity. The stakes are high.

* From 1961 to his retirement in 2003, Sociology Professor Art Shostak aided the AFT, NEA, and school superintendents nationwide improve K-12 reforms. In retirement he has helped develop a Holocaust Survivors Speaker project for Santa Rosa schools, seen the publication in 2017 of his 34th book, posted a related website –www.stealthaltruism.com, and given related talks in Australia, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, and throughout the USA.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/sephardim-and-holocaust

Korach's Genius

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

In the past few years, "bringing people together" to support a position has become a rallying cry and put on a pedestal as a lofty goal. Whether for politics or community building, it is definitely a valuable skill.
But it's not the only skill worth having. Sometimes a person's talent is discovering insights and relaying truth to people. Having concerns about "togetherness" can hinder that person's work. Imagine if a scientist had to alter his research to please people so they'd "come together" or if a Jewish scholar abrogated his duties to speak unalterable Torah truths to keep the coalition together. Cue the prophet Jeremiah who had this duty throughout his life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom,

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Korach: Holiness in the Midst of the Community

The Need For a Minyan

Judaism has an interesting concept called a minyan, a prayer quorum. Special prayers sanctifying God's name (such as the kedushah and kaddish prayers) may only be said when ten men are present. An individual may pray in solitude, but without a minyan, certain parts of the liturgy must be omitted.

The Talmud derives the requirement for a prayer quorum from God's declaration, "I will be sanctified in the midst of the Israelites" (Lev. 22:32). What exactly does the word 'midst' mean?

We find the word 'midst' used again when God warned the people living nearby the dissenters in Korach's rebellion: "Separate yourselves from the midst of this eidah (community)" (Num. 16:20). From here, the Sages learned that God is sanctified within an eidah.

And what is the definition of eidah? The Torah refers to the ten spies who brought a negative report of the Land of Israel as an eidah ra'ah, an evil community (Num. 14:26). So we see that God is sanctified in a community of at least ten members.

The requirement for a prayer quorum, and the way it is derived, raises two issues that need to be addressed:

- Prayer appears to be a private matter between the soul and its Maker. Why should we need a minyan of ten participants in order to pray the complete service?

- Why is the requirement for a minyan derived precisely from two classic examples of rebellion and infamy — the spies and Korach?

Perfecting the Community

Holiness is based on our natural aspirations for spiritual growth and perfection. However, the desire to perfect ourselves — even spiritually — is not true holiness. Our goal should not be the fulfillment of our own personal needs, but rather to honor and sanctify our Maker. Genuine holiness is an altruistic striving for good for its own sake, not out of self-interest.

The core of an elevated service of God is when we fulfill His will by helping and uplifting society. Therefore, the kedushah (sanctification) prayer may not be said in private. Without a community to benefit and elevate, the individual cannot truly attain higher levels of holiness.

This special connection between the individual and society is signified by the number ten. Ten is the first number that is also a group, a collection of units forming a new unit. Therefore, the minimum number of members for a quorum is ten.

Learning from Villains

Why do we learn this lesson from the wicked? It is precisely the punishment of the wicked that sheds light on the reward of the righteous. If the only result of evil was that the wicked corrupt themselves, it would be unnecessary for the law to be so severe with one who is only hurting himself. However, it is part of human nature that we influence others and are influenced by our surroundings. Unfortunately, evil people have a negative influence on the entire community, and it is for this reason that they are punished so severely.

Understanding why the wicked are punished clarifies why the righteous are rewarded. Just as the former are punished principally due to their negative influence on the community, so too, the reward of the righteous is due primarily to their positive influence. Now it becomes clear that true holiness is in the context of the organic whole. And the kedushah prayer sanctifying God's Name may only be recited in a minyan, with a representative community of ten members.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 258-260. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 104.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORACH60.htm

The First Populist (Korach 5778)

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

The story of Korach has much to teach us about one of the most disturbing phenomena of our time: the rise of populism in contemporary politics. Korach was a populist, one of the first in recorded history – and populism has re-emerged in the West, as it did in the 1930s, posing great danger to the future of freedom.

Populism is the politics of anger.[1] It makes its appearance when there is widespread discontent with political leaders, when people feel that heads of institutions are working in their own interest rather than that of the general public, when there is a widespread loss of trust and a breakdown of the sense of the common good.

People come to feel that the distribution of rewards is unfair: a few gain disproportionately and the many stay static or lose. There is also a feeling that the country they once knew has been taken away from them, whether because of the undermining of traditional values or because of large scale immigration.

Discontent takes the form of the rejection of current political and cultural elites. Populist politicians claim that they, and they alone, are the true voice of the people. The others, the existing leaders, are sharing out the rewards among themselves, indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Populists stir up resentment against the establishment. They are deliberately divisive and confrontational. They promise strong leadership that will give the people back what has been taken from them.

In 2017, support for populist parties throughout Europe was running at around 35 per cent, the highest level since the late 1930s. Parties of the Far Right gained power in Poland and Hungary, and made a strong showing in Austria, France and Holland. In Southern Europe, in countries like Spain and Greece, populism tends to be of the Left. Regardless of what form it takes, when populism is on the rise, tyranny is around the corner.[2] Human rights are dispensed with. The public grants the strong leader exceptional powers: so it was in the 1930s with Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. People are willing to sacrifice their freedom for the promised utopia, and to tolerate great evils against whichever scapegoat the leader chooses to blame for the nation's problems.

The Korach rebellion was a populist movement, and Korach himself an archetypal populist leader. Listen carefully to what he said about Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3).

These are classic populist claims. First, implies Korach, the establishment (Moses and Aaron) is corrupt. Moses has been guilty of nepotism in appointing his own brother as High Priest. He has kept the leadership roles within his immediate family instead of sharing them out more widely. Second, Korach presents himself as the people's champion. The whole community, he says, is holy. There is nothing special about you, Moses and Aaron. We have all seen God's miracles and heard His voice. We all helped build His Sanctuary. Korach is posing as the democrat so that he can become the autocrat.

Next, he and his fellow rebels mount an impressive campaign of fake news – anticipating events of our own time. We can infer this indirectly. When Moses says to God, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them" (Num. 16:15), it is clear that he has been accused of just that: exploiting his office for personal gain. When 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 own idea" (Num. 16:28) it is equally clear that he has been accused of representing his own decisions as the will and word of God.

Most blatant is the post-truth claim of Datham and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you want to lord it over us!" (Num. 16:13). This is the most callous speech in the Torah. It combines false nostalgia for Egypt (a "land flowing with milk and honey"!), blaming Moses for the report of the spies, and accusing him of holding on to leadership for his own personal prestige – all three, outrageous lies.

Ramban was undoubtedly correct[3] when he says that such a challenge to Moses' leadership would have been impossible at any earlier point. Only in the aftermath of the episode of the spies, when the people realised that they would

not see the Promised Land in their lifetime, could discontent be stirred by Korach and his assorted fellow-travellers. They felt they had nothing to lose. Populism is the politics of disappointment, resentment and fear.

For once in his life, Moses acted autocratically, putting God, as it were, to the test:

“This is how you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord.” (Num. 16:28-30).

This dramatic effort at conflict resolution by the use of force (in this case, a miracle) failed completely. The ground did indeed open up and swallow Korach and his fellow rebels, but the people, despite their terror, were unimpressed. “On the next day, however, the whole congregation of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord” (Num. 17:6). Jews have always resisted autocratic leaders.

What is even more striking is the way the sages framed the conflict. Instead of seeing it as a black-and-white contrast between rebellion and obedience, they insisted on the validity of argument in the public domain. They said that what was wrong with Korach and his fellows was not that they argued with Moses and Aaron, but that they did so “not for the sake of Heaven.” The schools of Hillel and Shammai, however, argued for the sake of Heaven, and thus their argument had enduring value.[4] Judaism, as I argued in Covenant and Conversation Shemot this year, is unique in the fact that virtually all of its canonical texts are anthologies of arguments.

What matters in Judaism is why the argument was undertaken and how it was conducted. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is one that is undertaken for the sake of victory. An argument for the sake of Heaven is undertaken for the sake of truth. When the aim is victory, as it was in the case of Korach, both sides are diminished. Korach died, and Moses’ authority was tarnished. But when the aim is truth, both sides gain. To be defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. As R. Shimon ha-Amsoni said: “Just as I received reward for the exposition, so I will receive reward for the retraction.”[5]

In his excellent short book, What is Populism?, Jan-Werner Muller argues that the best indicator of populist politics is its delegitimation of other voices. Populists claim that “they and they alone represent the people.” Anyone who disagrees with them is “essentially illegitimate.” Once in power, they silence dissent. That is why the silencing of unpopular views in university campuses today, in the form of “safe space,” “trigger warnings,” and “micro-aggressions,” is so dangerous. When academic freedom dies, the death of other freedoms follows.

Hence the power of Judaism’s defence against populism in the form of its insistence on the legitimacy of “argument for the sake of Heaven.” Judaism does not silence dissent: to the contrary, it dignifies it. This was institutionalised in the biblical era in the form of the prophets who spoke truth to power. In the rabbinic era it lived in the culture of argument evident on every page of the Mishnah, Gemara and their commentaries. In the contemporary State of Israel, argumentativeness is part of the very texture of its democratic freedom, in the strongest possible contrast to much of the rest of the Middle East.

Hence the life-changing idea: If you seek to learn, grow, pursue truth and find freedom, seek places that welcome argument and respect dissenting views. Stay far from people, places and political parties that don’t. Though they claim to be friends of the people, they are in fact the enemies of freedom.

Shabbat shalom.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The best recent treatment is Jan-Werner Muller’s short book, What is Populism?, Penguin, 2017. See also the important paper, Populism: The Phenomenon, Bridgewater associates, 22 March 2017.

[2] See Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny: 20 Lessons from the 20th Century, Bodley Head, 2017.

[3] Ramban, Commentary to Num. 16:1.

[4] Mishneh Avot 5:20.

[5] Pesachim 22b.

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

https://rabbisacks.org/first-populist-korach-5778/

The Rebbe's Vision

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer* © Chabad 2021

As many of you know, this Sunday we celebrate the 27th yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. "Celebrate" might seem like an unusual word to use for a yahrzeit, but the anniversary of the passing of a tzaddik, a holy man, is considered a "Yom Hillula," a day of joy, blessings, and celebration to all connected to the tzaddik. And if you are reading this, you have that special connection.

The Rebbe devoted his life to the service of others. He attended to the physical and spiritual needs of all who called to him, both Jew and Gentile, alike.

There is a saying in Chabad that the Rebbe created leaders, not followers. The Rebbe, in an unparalleled move in Jewish history, sent these leaders, these shluchim, to communities and countries all around the world, in places that lacked Jewish essentials – kosher food, ritual baths, and Jewish education.

Emulating the Rebbe, these shluchim and shluchos also dedicate their lives to the service of others, often under great hardship.

Speaking of hardships. In the year 1986, the Rebbe began giving out "Sunday Dollars," where men, women, and children would stand in line to speak a few words to the Rebbe, to seek his blessing, or to ask the Rebbe a pressing question. The Rebbe, even at age 90, would stand for hours to greet each person with a smile, a kind word, and a dollar to be given for tzedakah, charity.

An elderly woman came to the Rebbe one day and said, "Rebbe, I am younger than you and I am exhausted from standing. You have been standing much longer than me and will continue standing until the early hours of the morning. How do you do it?"

The Rebbe smiled and said the iconic words, "When you are counting diamonds, you don't get tired!" This is how the Rebbe envisioned every Jew, regardless of how near or far they were from Judaism. All diamonds.

The Rebbe's influence, however, extended far beyond the Jewish community. Let me tell you the story of the Rebbe and the Congresswoman.

In 1969, Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman to be elected to Congress. She represented the neighborhood of Crown Heights, which includes the headquarters of the Chabad movement. At one time, Crown Heights was a posh residential area, but by the 1960s, it had fallen into urban decay, where poverty and crime were rampant.

Sheryl Chisholm's goal as a Congresswoman was to increase the quality of life for her constituents by focusing on educational programs and job opportunities and she hoped to achieve this by receiving an appointment to the House Education and Labor Committee.

To her chagrin, however, and perhaps as an attempt to thwart her growing influence, Congresswoman Chisholm was appointed to the Congressional Agricultural Committee.

The Congresswoman was despondent and frustrated by this appointment. Agriculture? In the middle of Brooklyn?! What was there to do? Seed tomatoes up and down Eastern Parkway? Her hopes of uplifting and providing educational opportunities for her community were dashed.

Her vision was changed, however, when she received a phone call from one of her Crown Heights neighbors: The Lubavitcher Rebbe, himself.

The Rebbe inquired about her appointment and after some prodding, the Congresswoman confessed the dismay and disappointment she felt about being assigned to the Agricultural Committee.

The Rebbe, however, was adamant that the Congresswoman's appointment to the Agricultural Committee was a blessing in disguise! The Rebbe reiterated that America has a glut of surplus food, on one hand, and families with empty shelves, on the other. The Rebbe implored the Congresswoman to use her position to find a way to fill these empty shelves!

Sometime after speaking with the Rebbe, Congresswoman Chisholm had a chance meeting with Bob Dole, first time Senator from Kansas at the time. During their meeting, Senator Dole happened to mention that farmers in his state were producing so much food that they were losing money on their crops. Senator Dole's statement immediately brought back the conversation the Congresswoman had with the Rebbe.

With the help of Senator Dole, and the wisdom of the Rebbe in her pocket, Congressman Chisholm forged ahead and established two of the biggest government programs to date: Both the Food Stamp and WIC programs, which feed millions of men, women, and children each year!

On her retirement in the 80s, Congresswoman Chisholm is quoted as saying, "A Rabbi taught me that what you may think is a challenge is a gift from G d. And if poor babies have milk, and poor children have food, it's because this Rabbi in Crown Heights had a vision".

But no vision was stronger in the Rebbe than that of the coming of Moshiach. He taught that our generation is a gilgul, a reincarnation, of the Jews who left Egypt. And just as it was in the merit of the Jewish woman that we were redeemed from Egypt, it will be in the merit of the Jewish woman that we will be redeemed in this generation.

The 5th Rebbe of Chabad, the Rebbe Rashab, coined the phrase "simcha poretz geder," that joy breaks all boundaries. Let us take this to heart and serve Hashem with true joy as we watch the Rebbe's vision unfold before our eyes!

https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5158556/jewish/Gimmel-Tammuz.htm

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What Did the Rebbe Say to the Anti-Religious Chief Justice Who Came for Simchat Torah?

By Tzci Freeman *

What do you do if you’re celebrating and rejoicing with friends, and the man who opposes you in your greatest life-battles turns up at the party?

This was Simchat Torah, 1975, at Chabad-Lubavitch Headquarters, 770 Eastern Parkway. Thousands of Lubavitchers were packed in tight, along with anyone else who wished to witness the most joyous hakafot in the world on the most joyous day of the year.

The gabbaim—esteemed official administrators—of the synagogue were frantically attempting to bring some order to the ceremony, while seeking out the contingent that would come every year from the Israeli consulate.

That’s when they saw Haim Cohn. And they didn’t know what to do. This was just the wrong man at the wrong party.

Wrong Man, Wrong Place

Who was Haim Cohn?

To Israelis, he is still known as one of the major architects of Israeli law, a great man of thought, and as a champion of human rights. Indeed, he was in New York for the United Nations general assembly, representing Israel in the Human

Rights Commission. But Haim Cohn was also well known for his fierce opposition to all things religious, especially when they concerned the Israeli State.

Cohn came from a family of deeply religious Torah scholars in Lübeck, Germany. In 1929, at the age of eighteen, Cohn set out for Jerusalem, where he studied under Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who he came to greatly admire, and at the Hebrew University. He returned to Europe to complete his degree in law at the University of Frankfurt, marrying there a young woman who was not interested in religion.

After returning to the Holy Land with the rise of the Third Reich in 1933, he gradually turned not just away from, but against Torah Judaism, actively opposing the rabbis, both as an authority of Israeli law and as a member of the T'hila Movement for Israeli Jewish secularism.

“The Elisha ben Avuya of our generation,” was the title given him by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, son and protégé of his former mentor. Elisha ben Avuya was a brilliant sage of the Talmud, the teacher of Rabbi Meir, who had turned to heresy. Smoke rose from his grave, the Talmud tells, for well over a hundred years—and that was after the sages prayed for mercy on his soul. “Because he knew G d’s greatness and yet rebelled.”1

Eventually, Cohn divorced his first wife and traveled to America for a secular marriage to a woman who had been previously married—an act that spurred the fury of rabbis in Israel. By Torah law, a descendant of Aaron, such as Haim Cohn, is forbidden to marry a divorcée.

But perhaps what concerned the gabbaim most was Haim Cohn’s role in the “Who Is a Jew” controversy.

This was a topic the Rebbe had addressed incessantly for the previous five years, warning in the strongest language imaginable that compromise on such a core issue posed an existential danger to the Jewish nation. Haim Cohn, on the other hand, as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel, stood his ground that Jewishness, as the state, is a social construct, and anyone who personally identifies as a Jew should be embraced by the state as a Jew.

The gabbaim who beheld this man standing before them knew well the controversy, indeed, the outright condemnation in many quarters that would arise if they gave him any part in the ceremony. Small wonder they stalled.

The Weight of Torah

But the Rebbe noted the hesitation of the gabbaim and protested.

“A Jew wants to take on the yoke of Torah,” he chided them, “and you won’t give it to him?”

The Rebbe personally purchased the reading of the first verse of the ceremony and said something to a gabbai, who then called out, “We hereby honor the illustrious Justice of the Supreme Court, Reb Haim haKohen, with the verse, “Atta Hareisa.”

Haim Cohn bellowed out his verse, loud and proud, and the Rebbe, the gabbaim, and the crowd of chassidim echoed him in full chorus.

The episode had not ended. When the gabbaim took out the Torah Scrolls, the first and the heaviest—the one known as “Moshiach’s Sefer Torah”—was heading straight towards Haim Cohn.

Again the gabbaim hesitated. This was a very heavy scroll after all, and Haim Cohn was no young man. It would make more sense to hand him one of the smaller, lighter scrolls.

The Rebbe looked Cohn straight in the eye. He asked, “Are you ready to accept upon yourself the weight of the yoke of Torah?”

If you never experienced that look, it’s difficult to relate. Two sharp blue eyes pierce through your flesh down to your bone and deep into your soul. There is nowhere to hide and nothing of you that remains hidden before those eyes.

Haim Cohn answered in the affirmative. The gabbaim relented.

When the singing and dancing began, Haim Cohn was still clutching his Torah, singing and dancing along with the consulate members and chassidim for a full three-quarters of an hour. Even as the Rebbe sang and clapped and encouraged the crowd with explosive joy, his eyes never left Haim Cohn.

That night, Cohn returned to his hotel. He returned to Israel, to his post, and to his opinions. Ten years later, he was still writing about “Who Is a Jew,” without any deflection from his original stance.

Looking Deep

If you never met the Rebbe, if you didn’t know his ways, you might misinterpret this story.

You might say, “The Rebbe was very smart. He knew how to deal with his detractors. He knew that rather than arguing with a Jew, better to befriend him. That way, you have a far better chance of enlisting them to your cause—or at least, mitigating their gunfire. Too bad it didn’t work in this case.”

But that is not the Rebbe. And the proof: In this case, the risk was too big to fake.

With utter confidence, the Rebbe declared that this Jew was here for one purpose: “to accept the yoke of Torah.” And he even took the gamble of publicly asking a man who had fought against Torah for 30 years—with no sign of regret, “Are you ready to accept the yoke of Torah?” What if Cohn had said “no?”

And even if he didn’t say no, what if he didn’t mean what he said? The Rebbe was certainly a stickler when it came to halachah. How could he permit handing a Torah Scroll to a man known for his fight against things sacred to the Jewish people—and asking him to lead an entire congregation in prayer (as indeed the Rebbe’s critics demanded to know upon hearing the story)?

But the Rebbe didn’t see before him an opportunity to win at a game. Or to gain a new adherent. Or even to gain some ground.

The Rebbe saw before him a Jew. And he believed in that Jew.

He believed that, regardless of everything this Jew had said and done for the past thirty years, a Torah Scroll remained for him the most precious, sacred object in the world. And that his innermost, deepest desire was to carry and embrace that Torah.

Did it help? Let’s say it didn’t. But, as the first rebbe of Chabad wrote in his classic work called the Tanya, when you see a Jew who is not doing the right thing, pull that Jew in with thick cords of love. Perhaps he will change his ways, perhaps not. Either way, you’ve fulfilled the mitzvah of loving another Jew.

But I believe it did help.

You see, years later, a certain Chabadnik befriended a certain Israeli who lived in Manhattan. Before Simchat Torah, he invited him to come to 770 and celebrate with the Rebbe.

But the man refused, adamantly. “I have a friend,” he explained, “who went there one year. And it changed his mind about many things. I am not interested in changing my mind about anything. I’m not coming.”

The friend, as you may have guessed, was Haim Cohn.

Outwardly, perhaps, at least in the immediate, nothing changed. But then, Maimonides writes in his Laws of Repentance that if a Jew has regret in the recesses of his heart, even if he remains recalcitrant, his repentance is accepted and his share in the World To Come reinstated.2

And eventually, as Maimonides writes in a famous letter to the Jews of Yemen, this Jew will come to a complete repentance. As the verse goes, “Return, wayward children, and I will heal your returning.”3

Judaism as Belief in Jews

Some people today have lost faith in their fellow Jews. With the conflation of politics and religion and the intensely polarizing pull of social media, some have gone so far to declare that we have become, G d forbid, two separate peoples.

Such a perception can only arise when our eyes do not see beneath the most external presentation of a Jew. When we judge people by their behavior, by their stated opinions, by their choices at the voting polls that go against our own.

But that is not Judaism. Judaism is not an ideology or even a set of practices that determine whether we keep you as a Jew or chuck you out as a stranger.

Rather, Judaism is a divine wisdom, known as Torah, that, when presented in all its authenticity, Judaism is not about who is in and who is out, but about utter faith in your fellow Jew, that his or her deepest desire is to embrace the Torah.has the unique capacity to awaken the inner spark of a Jew, thereby connecting all of us together as one people with one Torah and one G d.

Connect with that other Jew and you will see the good that's there. It's likely not so far from the surface. You may even find there's far more you agree upon than you disagree upon.

As with Haim Cohn and the Rebbe. Cohn was a champion of human rights, something I imagine the Rebbe admired in him. He was also known for visiting the prisoners he had sentenced to jail, to ensure they were being well-treated.

"If I had my way," he once said, "I'd scrap prisons." Interestingly enough, the Rebbe said pretty much the same to Justice J. B. Weinstein.

So when you see another Jew at your party, even if he's not the person you want to see there, even if you think he's a sinner, even if you believe he is actively destroying the most sacred, essential elements of our people, even if he voted for the party you most despise, look deeper. Believe in that Jew.

As much as you believe in G d, believe in that Jew.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 9b.

2. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 3:14.

3. Jeremiah 3:22.

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https://www.chabaddayton.com/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/5150171/jewish/What-Did-the-Rebbe-Say-to-the-Anti-Religious-Chief-Justice-Who-Came-for-Simchat-Torah.htm

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Moses Never Gave Up on Them

By Yossi Ives *

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

In anticipation of this event, G d instructed Moses:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some sources2 suggest that Moses was hoping that the men would be embarrassed and seize their last chance to repent; but Rashi makes no mention of repentance. Moreover, the Torah attests that Moses was the most "humble person on the face of the earth."3 Surely, then, getting respect would be the last thing on his mind!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It turns out there is a rather significant clue in the text. The verse reads "the elders of Israel followed Moses when he set off to the tents of the three men." Why was it necessary to say this? How does this detail add to the story? In fact, it is a central element. That is how Moses elevated the occasion. He did not just go himself to get the matter over with. Rather

he first “arose” and turned it into a big event, one that would involve all the elders. Moses and all the elders marching in formation would have drawn a huge crowd.

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 16:23-27.

2. Tanchuma Korach 3; Bamidbar Rabba Korach 18:4.

3. Numbers 12:3.

4. Genesis 23:17.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5152305/jewish/Moses-Never-Gave-Up-on-Them.htm

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Why Did Moses Go To Dathan and Aviram?

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Korach won over a large crowd of people to his side, in his revolt against Moses, with the help of two members of the tribe of Reuben, the brothers Dathan and Aviram. Yet, Moses tried to convince them to abandon Korach’s mutiny.

"Moses arose and went to Dathan and Aviram." (Numbers 16:25)

Dathan and Aviram had openly demonstrated their animosity toward Moses, accusing him of being a despot and an impostor. Moreover, G-d Himself had already sealed their punishment, instructing Moses only to save the other rebels from Dathan and Aviram’s impending fate. Still, Moses did not give up hope that his “enemies” would repent, doing everything in his power to influence them to reconsider.

We learn from Moses to always do whatever we can to bring our brethren back to G-d and His Torah—even when it seems that all hope is lost. This is true even when they are ignoring their faith intentionally, and all the more so when they are acting out of ignorance.

— * from *Daily Wisdom #1*

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בס"ד

Korach – The Price of Character

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

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

If we could put ourselves in Aharon's place, this is an astounding and inspiring display of the nobility which a human being can strive for. Unexpectedly, Aharon suddenly found himself surrounded by hundreds of noble leaders, all declaring him unworthy. The shame must have been painful. At the same time, Aharon knew that Hashem had chosen him. He must have felt such righteous indignation at being challenged. This challenge then built and continued until the next day when Korach gathered the entire nation against Moshe and Aharon. Yet, through it all, Aharon chose silence. He could not bring himself to stand up and proclaim his own worthiness. He even went so far as to accept their challenge and present himself as if he truly was unworthy of his G-d given position. Such is the nobility and dignity which a human being can achieve.

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

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

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

As we go through our daily routine lives, it is easy to see ourselves as small and insignificant. We don't see any obvious impact to our decisions, words and actions. This Ramba"n teaches us that the impact we have on our own character is already of great significance. Every time we deepen our sensitivities we have achieved something of great importance before G-d, because each one of us individually is G-d's precious child. As we go through life, there are many factors to consider in our interactions. G-d wants us to understand and realize that the impact our conduct has on ourselves must be included and weighed in every decision we make.

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

How Not to Argue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They are contemporary instances of arguments not for the sake of heaven. They are about

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Mishnah Avot 5:17.
[2] This is a composite of the views of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.
[3] See Vamik Volkan, The Need to have Enemies and Allies (1988).
[4] Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 13b.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Moses said to Korach: 'Hear me, sons of Levi: Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart [as Levites]… Must you also seek the priesthood?'" (Numbers 16:8-10)

Last week's portion of Shelah, in which the desert Israelites refused to wage war in the conquest of the Promised Land, portrayed the great rebellion against God—whereras this week's portion of Korach documents two great rebellions against Moses, the first by Korach and the second by Dathan and Abiram. Let us begin with Korach, the apparent leader of the pack who (you might remember) was called by the Sage Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk "the holy grandfather," (in Yiddish, die heiliger zeide).

After all, his desire is not for material gain or political power; it is rather for greater religious piety, for the assumption of the mantle of the kehuna-priesthood of Divine service. Next in the anti-Moses lineup are Dathan and Abiram, impudent upstarts who even refuse the opportunity of a personal meeting with Moses to reconcile their differences. "Is it not enough that you took us out from a land flowing with milk and honey [Egypt!] to have us die in the desert? Would you also lord it over us, yes, lord it over us?" (ibid. 12-13). The fact that they refer to Egypt as "a land flowing with milk and honey" demonstrates how very far they are from the vision of a Hebrew homeland, of Jerusalem as the city of world peace.

The one idea which unites all three rebels and their factions is their refusal to settle in the Promised Land of Israel. Dathan and Abiram hankered after the Egyptian "fleshpots." They were certain that if the Hebrews would only give up the clannish and old-fashioned customs and morality which they received from their ancestral forbears, then they would be accepted as brothers by the Egyptians and could assimilate into the wealthy and forward-looking Egyptian society.

Hence Dathan, Abiram and their cohorts were punished by being devoured by the earth, swallowed up by the very materialism which had overtaken their Abrahamic traditions and teachings (ibid. 33, Ibn Ezra ad loc).

Korach, on the other hand, was the "holy grandfather" who wished to remain close to God in the desert. He was the heir to Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who had brought a "strange fire which God had not commanded" (Lev. 10: 1). According to the Midrash, they were on an even higher spiritual elevation than Moses and Aaron, and so it was they who had been chosen by God to sanctify the Sanctuary when God sent fire from heaven to respond to the spontaneous fire which they had offered in religious ecstasy (Leviticus Raba 12:2 cited by Rashi, Lev. 10:3).

Korach, wanted to retain the rarefied and ethereal kollel atmosphere of the desert, where manna came down from heaven and where their travels were directed by God Himself.

Hence the Ibn Ezra maintains that Korach's end was similar to that of Nadab and Abihu, The "holy grandfather" was consumed by a "fire sent forth by the Lord which devoured the two hundred fifty men who offered the [fiery] incense" (Num. 16:35 and see Ibn Ezra to Num. 16:33). Korach, too, was against the conquest of Israel, but for spiritual rather than materialistic reasons: The holy grandfather did not wish to leave the close relationship to God enjoyed by the Hebrews in the desert. He was loath to dirty his hands and besmirch his soul by working the land and entering the world of political machinations necessary to develop a nation-state. And since the actions of the biblical personalities presage the deeds of their descendants, Korach's attitudes are extremely close to those of the haredim (ultra-Orthodox) today vis-a-vis the army and Torah study.

Despite his worthy motivation, Korach was a sinner who did not heed God's command for the conquest of Israel. God willed us to engage with His world, to work and develop that world, to perfect it and to preserve it (Gen. 2:15). God elected Abraham as the patriarch of His covenantal and eternal nation so that His treasured people would being "blessing to all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3); and the reason that God chose Abraham was because "he was instructing his children and his household after him to observe the pathway of the Lord to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Gen. 18:19). If Israel is indeed to be a source of blessing to all the nations on earth, it is necessary for Israel to be a nation like all other nations, to be a mighty and successful nation as well as a model ethical nation committed to peace without and within.

Immediately before the Revelation at Sinai, we are reminded that the entire world is God's. He is invested in the world and so must we be. Indeed, Seforno insists that "our being God's treasured people" (Ex. 19:5) reflects our mission as a kingdom of kohanim-teachers to understand and to teach all of humankind to call out in the name of the Lord so that we may serve Him, shoulder to shoulder." We dare not retreat from the world or from history; we must destroy Amalek and enthrone God. We must be a powerful and exemplary nation-state fulfilling our Zionist mission to be God's witnesses and a light until the nations from our homeland in Zion.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Two Types of People (part b) - In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shelach (Numbers 13:1-15:41), we read of two very different types of people. We read of the twelve men who were sent out from the wilderness on an espionage mission to spy out the land of Canaan. Upon their return, we discover that ten of them are, to say the least, pessimists. They report that the land is "a land that devours its inhabitants" and that it is occupied by giants who cannot possibly be conquered.

But two of them, Joshua and Caleb, have a different message. They optimistically report that "the land is very, very good" and that "if we but desist from rebelling against the Lord," we need not fear, and can easily even defeat, the giants.

The nineteenth-century commentator Rabbi Jacob Mecklenburg, whose work HaK'tav

VeHaKabbalah typically unveils hidden nuances in the Hebrew language of the biblical text, points out that our sacred language provides two different verbs to describe these two different types of people, optimists and pessimists.

Two different verbs are used in the Chumash for the term "spy." One is latur and the other is leragel. Rabbi Mecklenburg demonstrates that latur is best translated not as "to spy" but as "to explore," or perhaps as "to wander", or even as "to tour." On the other hand, leragel is best translated as "to seek fault," or "to find weaknesses".

One who engages in leragel is the classic pessimist. He seeks the negative in every situation and invariably finds it. But one whose mission is latur seeks the positive in his explorations and discovers, to use our metaphor, that the cup is not only half-full but entirely full.

Categorizing all of humanity into just two types of people is an overly simplistic approach and is, therefore, not always helpful. However, toward the end of this week's Torah portion, I discovered another use of the "two types of people" categorization that is extremely insightful and very instructive.

Here I draw upon another of the great nineteenth-century commentators, namely Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, known as the Netziv.

Towards the end of this week's parsha, we read about the mitzvah of tzitzit, of wearing strings upon the fringes of our four cornered garments. We are instructed that, in addition to the uncolored or white strings, there must be one or two strings dyed blue, called tekhelet.

The Netziv suggests, in a homiletic tour de force, that the white/uncolored strings and the blue dyed strings represent two types of people —more specifically, two types of devout religious people. He argues that there are those Jews whose piety is exemplary but who also engage in mundane matters. They attend synagogue regularly, keep the various festivals and ritual activities, study Torah, and contribute to charity. But they have other concerns, whether in the world of commerce, with the arts and sciences, or with political affairs.

Then there is another type of Jew, the person who is exclusively preoccupied with heavenly matters and has room in his life for only purely spiritual concerns. He has a mystical bent and prefers to avoid the material world.

The white strings represent the first type of Jew, suggests the Netziv, whereas the blue tekhelet strings represent the second type.

The Netziv points out that the passage contains two imperatives, two commands, to gaze at the tzitzis and thereby come to "remember the mitzvot and perform them." In verse 15:39, we read, "… and remember all of the Lord's mitzvot and perform them and do not be led astray by your heart and by your eyes". And in verse 40, we read again, "… so that you will remember and perform all of my mitzvot and thereby become holy to the Almighty."

"Are not these two verses repetitive?", asks the Netziv. He answers, and this is his tour de force, that the first verse is directed to the "whites," to those who observe the religious basics but who can be led astray by their other interests and activities. They are told to be sure to observe the tradition and not to be seduced by the ideologies that their "hearts" encounter and by the attractions that their "eyes" observe.

The second verse, continues the Netziv, is addressed in the religious purists, the "blues," who wish to "cleave to the Lord." They must be reminded that they too must observe all the mitzvot, even those that require intense involvement in everyday affairs, in the needs of the community, and in the establishment of a just society. Only thereby will they become "holy to the Almighty."

How relevant are the Netziv's words to all of us today. The "whites" among us have chosen a path that has its moral and ethical temptations. They must creatively and energetically resist those temptations. They must know their boundaries.

The "blues" among us must realize that they cannot remain "in the heavens," in the proverbial "ivory tower." They must bring their spiritual gifts to bear upon the imperfect world in which we all live.

We need both types of people, the "blues" and the "whites."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Torah Is the Great Unifier in Klal Yisrael

The pasuk says that Moshe told Korach and his followers: "Do this: Take for yourselves firepans – Korach and his entire assembly." [Bamidbar 16:6]. Rashi makes the interesting comment: "We only have one G-d, one Aron (Ark), one Torah, one Mizbayach (Altar), and one Kohen Gadol (High Priest)." Moshe is trying to dissuade the 250 people together with Korach from trying to pull off this stunt. Rashi points out that the nations of the world may have a variety of priests and a variety of deities that they worship, but that is not the case with the Jewish religion. Since our religion is based on a single G-d, a single Aron, Torah, Mizbeach, and Kohen Gadol, your group's challenge to the authority of Aharon will be an effort in futility.

I saw an interesting question. If we look at the Beis HaMikdash, Rashi's statement is in fact correct. There is one Menorah, one Shulchan, one Mizbayach, and one Aron. However, there were two Keruvim (Cherubs) on top of the Aron! How does that fit in with this concept that in the Beis HaMikdash everything was always "one of a kind"?

The Gerer Rebbe, the Beis Yisrael [1895-1997], comments that the Keruvim symbolized unity as well. Even though there were two of them, they faced each other. Therefore, despite the fact that they were two physical units, they are really just a single entity.

I saw an addition to what the Gerer Rebbe said, and I think it is a beautiful addition.

The Keruvim are attached to the Aron. What is in the Aron? The Torah is in the Aron. The Torah is the great unifier in Klal Yisrael. The Torah is able to combine disparate units and disparate kinds of people. That is the Torah. The Keruvim are considered one because they are attached to the Aron, which represents Torah, the great unifier in Klal Yisrael.

I recently made the point that as much as we like to tell ourselves that we are One Nation, the truth of the matter is that we are a fractious people. Even within the Orthodox world, there is significant division and divisiveness. We have different philosophic and hashkafic issues with different people, which are legitimate. We see that there are different people who occupy different places on the Orthodox spectrum. They have nothing to do with each other because of these philosophical differences and the intolerance that it breeds. However, it is not legitimate to become intolerant of each other because of those differences.

I commented that it has been my experience that despite our differences, we can come together on this Orthodox spectrum in three areas. The first area is business. People that have business dealings can get along fine with one another, irrespective of their religious convictions. A Jew dressed entirely in his customary chassidishe attire can interact with a Harvard educated knitted-Yarmulka-wearing customer or supplier. They barely speak the same language. One speaks a broken English and the other barely speaks a broken Yiddish but somehow, they can come together and do business. In matters of business, they can be the best of friends and trust one another implicitly. Why is that so? It is because "business is business."

The second area where I have seen—with my own eyes—that people who would normally not even bother acknowledging one another's presence bond closely together is in a hospital emergency room, or in a hospital surgical unit's family waiting room. Again, I have seen people from different backgrounds with different modes of dress and different hashkafos—but when they are there together in a time of trouble, they unite because of their tzores. They will daven for each other, they will support each other, and they will cry on

each other's shoulders, both figuratively and literally.

The third area where I have seen people of very diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds come together and bond intimately is at the Siyum haShas. (For me, this is the most prominent memory of those auspicious occasions.) When we complete the cycle of learning Talmud Bavli, you can see people dancing together who, again, would have nothing to do with one another under normal circumstances. Torah is the big unifier. Sometimes it may be only for a brief moment or for several hours during the Siyum haShas ceremony—but people feel connected to each other simply because we learned the same daf, we completed the same tractate, and we feel that unifying bond of sharing a common Torah.

Le'havdil, I find this also in society in general. One common denominator binds together all strata of society. There are wealthy people, educated people, truck drivers and neurosurgeons. However, one thing unifies all of them—sports! Again, one person can be in overalls with grease under his fingernails, a real beer belly swinging his six-pack. He is at the ballpark sitting next to a fellow using a blackberry and wearing a $600 Italian suit. They would not say boo to each other in any other setting, but here they are rooting for the same home team together. They share insights and they share intense emotions as the game progresses one way or another. Sports in general, and the "Home Team" in particular, are the great unifiers of general American society.

Sometimes when I am on a train or a plane and I need to speak to the person next to me, we might not have much in common. However, we can always talk sports with one another. L'Havdil, "We toil and they toil." For them, the great unifier is the sports team. For us, the great unifier is the Torah. So too, the Keruvim, even though they were two bodies, represent the Unity of Torah. The Aron makes them one.

Analyzing Where Korach Went Wrong

The second observation I would like to share is something I saw written up in the name of Rav Shneur Kotler, zt"l [1918-1982]. Parshas Korach is an extremely difficult parsha to understand. What led Korach to do what he did? (If my memory serves me correctly, I think I heard Rabbi Weinberg say on numerous occasions that he felt that Parshas Korach is the most difficult parsha in the Torah.) Korach was from among those who carried the Aron. He was a distinguished individual. Yet, he literally brought destruction upon himself and upon a couple of hundred other people as well. Rav Shneur offers an explanation that many other people offer as well. Korach's motivation, ironically, came from a good source. It was misplaced, but it came from a good source. That source was the rabbinic teaching that "Kin'as sofrim tarbeh chochmah" (scribal jealousy increases wisdom). We know that competition in Torah study is a motivational force, which expands knowledge.

Korach sought greater closeness with the Ribono shel Olam. The problem was that he was a Levi and Aharon was a Kohen. A Kohen does the Service inside the Beis HaMikdash itself. The Leviim are relegated to a secondary role. They are the gatekeepers. They sing in the choir during the offering of the sacrifices. However, they are not "on center court." They are not as close as the Kohanim to the Divine Service.

This was Korach's motivation. He felt that "the entire congregation was holy" so why was he not entitled to as great a role in the Divine Service as his cousin, Aharon. "I want more. I want to become closer to the Master of the World!" His fatal mistake was not recognizing that a Kohen is a Kohen and a Levi is a Levi. We do not have time to elaborate on the differences between the spiritual essence of one versus the other; but suffice it to say that different people are born with different strengths, and the Ribono shel Olam has specific roles for each of them to play.

The answer to the question "Why can't I have a more prominent role?" is that in order to get the job done, different people need to perform different roles. Any person who does his particular role, does it faithfully, and executes it to the best of his ability—the Ribono shel Olam is as happy and as satisfied with him as He is with the Kohen. The Levy that does his work with devotion and dedication in terms of his closeness to the Almighty is exactly as close as the Kohen. This is the fact that Korach and his followers failed to understand.

Rav Sheneur Kotler cites the text of the Daily Psalm recited by the Leviim in the Beis HaMikdash on Monday as a proof. It begins with the words "A song, a psalm by the sons of Korach." [Tehillim 48:1]. There is a pasuk in that chapter to which I never paid much attention. The pasuk reads, "Demeenu Elokim Chasdecha, b'kerev Heichalecha." We imagined (Demeenu comes from the word dimyon—imagination) O G-d that Your kindness can only be inside the midst of Your Sanctuary." However, our jobs unfortunately were relegated to outside the Sanctuary. Then the next pasuk says, "k'Shimcha Elokim ken Tehilascha al katzvei aretz." Even at the ends of the earth, we can still have that closeness. Even there, Your praise can be found. This was our mistake! This is the answer to the sons of Korach.

The sefer Bei Chiya brings an observation from a friend of his regarding this Shir shel Yom of Monday. Monday was the second day of Creation. What happened on the second day of Creation? The Ribono shel Olam split the "upper waters" from the "lower waters". It was the first time in the history of the universe that a division was made. There were waters that stayed up in Heaven with the Ribono shel Olam and there were waters that stayed down here to form the oceans eventually. The lower waters had complaints to the Almighty—"You are relegating us to be the Gulf of Mexico!" "Meanwhile, these waters in Heaven are next to You!" What did the Ribono shel Olam say? "No! This is the way it is!" There is a division. Eventually, He promised the lower waters that they would have their role as well, which would give them their own opportunity for closeness to Him. However, their role was to stay below. This is why we specifically recite the Psalm for the Children of Korach on Monday—the day that the Almighty says that it is possible to achieve closeness to Hashem both up in Heaven and down on earth.

Finally, at the end of the Parsha, when the Ribono shel Olam wants to validate the legitimacy of the Kehuna of Aharon, the Ribono shel Olam performs a miracle. The leaders of each tribe are told to take their staffs and place them in the Ohel Moed and the tribal leader whose staff will bring forth fruit—he is the person whom the Almighty deemed to be the Kohen Gadol.

What fruit does the Ribono shel Olam pick to deliver this message? Perhaps, we would have picked an apple—the most common fruit. The Almighty picked almonds. The Rebbe Reb Bunim translates the pasuk "…Vayetze perech, va'yatzetz tzitz, vayigmal shekeidim" [Bamidbar 17:23] – "First came out a flower, then it blossomed, and finally almonds emerged." Cut to the chase! Who needs the flower? Who needs the blossom? Let Hashem go straight to the almonds and get to the bottom line. The answer is that to produce almonds, you need to go through the process of flowers and blossoms and then finally fruit. That is the way life is. That is the way nature is. It is not just the bottom line. To produce anything, there needs to be a process and every part of that process is important.

That is the lesson the Almighty wished to send to Klal Yisrael. You can do whatever your job entails, and you can achieve the same closeness with the Holy One Blessed Be He because at the end of the day, you all participate in bringing forth the fruit, which is the Will of the Creator.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How would you define a kosher argument? The Mishna helps us. In Pirkei Avot – the Ethics of the Fathers – we are introduced to the concept of a 'machloket l'shem shamayim – an argument for the sake of heaven. An example is given: Hillel and Shamai – the debates between the two great Talmudic leaders and their schools of students who follow them. The Mishna goes on to tell us about a 'machloket shelo l'shem shamayim' – an argument not for the sake of heaven. Here, the example is taken from this weeks Parsha, Parshat Korach.

It is קֹרַח וְאֶל־כָּל־עֲדָתוֹ – 'Korach and his entire assembly', launched a vicious attack against Moshe and Aharon. I believe that the lesson emerging from this Mishna is pertinent and relevant for fragile societies across the globe at this time. What is the key feature of a 'machloket shelo l'sheim shamayim'? It is a purposeful divisiveness – when its proponent tried to create an atmosphere of them and us. Instead of tackling the substance of the issue at hand, they try to demonise their opponent. That is exactly what Korach did. He was aware that there were elements within the Israelite camp who bore an unjustifiable grudge against Moshe and Aharon and he was playing to that gallery.

He cried out against leaders 'U'madua titnasu kahal Hashem – why are you lauding yourselves, the congregation of the Lord' insinuating that Moshe and Aharon had usurped their power, that their egos had driven them to take authority upon their shoulders. This was so far from the truth because as we well know, these two exceptionally humble characters were the appointees of none other than Hashem himself.

Notice that in the Mishna the 'machloket l'shem shamayim' is Hillel and Shamai but the machloket shelo l'shem shamayim is קֹרַח וְאֶל־כָּל־עֲדָתוֹ – Korach and his assembly. It should have been Korach and Moshe and Aharon because they were the foes but here the Mishna wants us to understand that a feature of a 'machloket shelo l'shem shamayim' is that sometimes, those who collaborate together – actually come with separate agendas but at that moment they happen to have a common enemy.

Contrast this with Hillel and Shamai, yes they were locked into a continuous debate, sometimes quite bitter but they always remained the best of friends because both sides were seeking to determine the truth.

Both would always quote the view of the other when mentioning their own view and socially they got on well together. The Talmud tells us their families married into the family of the other. Those are the elements of a 'machloket l'shem shamayim' an argument for the sake of heaven.

In our Parsha there is a mitzvah – v'lo yehiyeh k'korach v'chadato – one should not be like Korach and his assembly. This is a mitzvah which we call upon the entire world to keep at this exceptionally challenging time. Let us instead always be like Hillel and Shamai, to engage in an argument for the sake of heaven which is a kosher argument.

OTS Dvar Torah

Disputes, Wars and Everything in Between
Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum

The Torah and the Jewish mentality demand for there to be disagreement as the ideal state of things, precisely because Judaism isn't a religion of dogma and conflict.

Constant disputes have been a part of the Jewish world throughout history. The Jewish world is one of many different opinions. It's the world of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. It's a colorful world, filled with diverging worldviews. Torah study, too, is based on the never-ending dialectics between parent and child; rabbi and disciple. They cross swords and express their personal views as part of their Torah study: "Even a father and his son, or a rabbi and his student, who are engaged in Torah together … become each other's enemies … But they do not leave there until they love each other…" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 30b).

Torah study turns into a dispute. It isn't a meeting point of peace and harmony, but rather, a place where the differences between the sides are articulated. It is only at the conclusion of the study session, after the argument has become heated, with each side expressing what they feel in their hearts, that peace can be achieved – provided that the two sides listen to each other, and engage in dialog. At times, studying, the disputes that arise, the arguments and the rationales are even more important than the conclusions themselves.

It is notable that the Torah, and Jewish mentality, do not require accord. Instead, they consider disagreement to be the ideal state. The reason for this seems to be that Judaism is a religion of discussion and dispute, but it isn't one of dogmas, wars and conflicts. Of all things, Judaism requires us to dispute precisely because it causes the truth – both personal truth and communal truth – to be revealed. The world benefits greatly from disputes that are developed. We believe in the culture of dispute in Judaism, in the ability to present different ways of thinking while respecting and empathizing with others and avoiding feuds, a principle echoed by the author of Aruch Hashulchan:

"To the contrary, this is the glory of our holy and pure Torah. For the entire Torah is called a song, and the song becomes glorious because of the different voices within it – and this is the basis of pleasantness" (Introduction to Aruch Hashulchan – Choshen Misphat).

There are two ways to resolve disputes and conflicts – either by enforcing one's authority, or by having a dialog and persuading the other side. Those who try resolving the problem forcefully are essentially not accepting the other side as having an opinion and a right to present their own view. Generally, the use of force does not solve problems, it just pushes off the resolution of the problem to a different time or place, and sometimes, it even perpetuates the problem. Those who try to work out the dispute through dialog and persuasion try to win over the heart of their opponent out of mutual respect. The only true way to resolve conflicts is by respecting other human beings and their opinions. We need not think alike, and it's OK to disagree. We can disagree, of course, but we mustn't end up feuding.

This is what Rabbi Kook writes, in his remarkable use of language: "There are those who err by thinking that world peace is unattainable unless everyone shares the same opinions and character traits. Afterwards, when they see Torah scholars analyzing and investigating the wisdom and knowledge in the Torah, and when the views and methods multiply during that process, they think that these scholars have caused dispute, which is the opposite of peace. But that is not the case, for true peace cannot come to the world without the value of the multiplicity of peace. The multiplicity of peace is when all of the sides and methods emerge, and when they work out how each position has a place and a role, each according to its value, subject and place. Only by gathering all of the pieces and details, and bringing all of the supposedly varying opinions together, as well as the opposing disciplines, will truth and justice come to light." ("Torah scholars increase peace in the world").

Each individual brings along his or her unique qualities, and that is the real meaning of the oneness of creation. It isn't that all creatures blend together into a bland mush, but rather that we make up an ensemble containing a wide gamut of unique entities, each of them contributing to the whole and completing each other.

I find it regretful that there are nearly no true disputes in the Jewish world – just wars and conflicts. No mutual respect, no listening, no attempt to have a dialog for heaven's sake, one that is fated to exist. Rabbi Aharon Milevsky, who was a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski and Rabbi Kook, and who had, for years, served as the chief rabbi of Uruguay, made the following remark when addressing his community during his farewell party: "Small people create wars. Great people create disputes."

May it be the will of Hashem that we renew the splendor of the past and renew the culture of dispute in Israel – and stop the wars.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

A Priceless Coat

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach, and the entire wealth. (Bamidbar 16:32)

Somebody once asked Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. why the Torah describes Korach as being swallowed by the "mouth of the earth". Without a moment of hesitation he answered "Because he opened up his big mouth, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him

up!" This is clearly a classic and obvious example of the Torah principle, Mida Knegged Mida- Measure for Measure.

That explains the "mouth" factor, but I am left wondering, "Why the earth?"

The Mishne in Pirke Avos (1:17) states, "Shimon his son (of Raban Gamliel) says, "All my days I have been raised among the Sages and I have found nothing better for the body than silence, not study but practice is the main thing; everyone who talks excessively brings on sin." The Maharal wonders why the Mishne does not declare that silence is beneficial for the person. Why is it good for the body?

The Maharal explains that within a person like a country there is a giant war taking place about who will gain control of the communication system, the media. Speech is a holy-holy function, and a uniquely G-d like feature installed only in humanity. It is manifest when chosen words are filtered down through Sechel Elochus – the Sublime G-dly Intellect.

The Igeres Ramban spells out a strategy for success in prayer that applies equally to all life situations. "Think about the word before it exits your mouth!" Isn't that super advice?! That Talmud declares, "What should be the craft of a person in this world? Make yourself like someone who is mute!" (Chulin)

Why is that a craft? A real craft takes years and years of apprenticeship to achieve mastery. What's the big trick here!? Employ some duct tape and finished! No, that's not good enough. We cannot shut down the function of speech altogether.
My father in law was a master tailor and after surviving the war he worked for many decades making high end coats and suits that sold for many thousands of dollars.

He had to have been a major expert at his craft to command such prices for his work. I am certain if you gave any of us the same quality of materials, cloth, scissors, needle, and thread few of us would be able to produce anything more than a crude art project.

He also had a pattern, a plan that he worked from, and he had a motto that he lived by. I remember him saying it. "Measure twice and cut once." Before we speak we need a plan. The mouth is a sharp instrument like a scissor and we need to think twice at least and speak once.

Very often, though, the Maharal explains, it's feelings that are couched as ideas which gush forth from the mouth. They bubble up with force from the Nefesh Behamias – the animal soul, which is the selfish and earthy part of the human personality.

When that part of us is dominating the power of speech, like a wild stallion we cannot estimate how much destruction it will do before it is captured and tamed by G-dly reason.

The Mishne suggests quieting the body and curing it with silence. Not every feeling needs to be acted upon. Feelings are real to the feeler but they don't rule. We can quietly validate them without acting out or speaking out uncontrollably.

It's no wonder the Midrash quoted by the Vilna Gaon makes such a huge promise. "For each and every moment that a person seals his mouth, he merits a hidden light that no angel or other creature could ever estimate!"."

So rather than thrashing wildly and digging and deepening his own grave, he is quietly studying the pattern, the supernal plan and carefully measuring before cutting with this sharp and most powerful of instruments, and the end product will no doubt be a priceless coat!

Weekly Parsha KORACH 5781
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah teaches us in this week's reading that one should never underestimate the power and influence that ego and arrogance can play within the lives of people who are otherwise seen as wise, capable, and even moral. Throughout the ages, the commentators have asked themselves the famous question, quoted by Rashi and based on midrash: "What drove Korach to commit such a foolish act?"

Rashi points out that Korach understood that his descendants in future generations would be prominent people of great leadership. He could not imagine that they would achieve such a status of power and recognition when he himself was not able to boast of such an achievement. While this explanation certainly cast some light on the issue, it does not fully resolve the problem.

There are many instances in life and history when later generations of a certain family rose to power and influence, even though their origins were humble. Most commentators fall back on the idea that it was the great wealth that Korach possessed that drove him to this folly of behavior.

We are aware that wealth and money many times do strange things to otherwise normal people. The Talmud always pictured money – coins – as being made of fire. They can warm and illuminate or burn and destroy. That certainly is true of the nature of money and how it affects individuals, especially those who have become wealthy over a short period of time. Our world is full of examples of wealthy people who suddenly become experts in all sorts of disciplines in life, whereas before they were wealthy, did not claim such expertise.

It is interesting to note that the Torah sought to limit the potential for any of the Levite families from becoming exceedingly wealthy. Levites in the land of Israel were subject to public service. Their income was based upon the goodwill of their Israelite neighbors, who would grant them their share of the food ordained by the Torah. I imagine that no matter how much of the tithe any given Levite would have received, the feeling of being wealthy – certainly, exceedingly wealthy – would not ever be experienced.

People who are dependent upon the goodwill of others never feel themselves as secure as those who possess great wealth. The truth is that no one is secure, and that even great wealth can disappear in an unknowing and unpredictable fashion. Nevertheless, when a person knows that he or she does not possess great wealth, that person is more careful and circumspect in advancing opinions and demanding honor. The combination of the natural ego that exist within all of us, and especially those like Korach who have aristocratic bloodlines combined with the largess of great wealth, can oftentimes be a lethal mix that leads to disaster. That certainly was the case regarding Korach and his group of followers.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Servant Leadership (Korach 5781)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was believed to be not just one way of organising a society but the only way. The very universe was organised on this principle, as was the rest of life. The sun ruled the heavens. The lion ruled the animal kingdom. The king ruled the nation. That is how it was in nature. That is how it must always be. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled.[2]

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

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

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

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

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

This is how Maimonides describes the proper conduct of a King:

Just as the Torah has granted him the great honour and obligated everyone to revere him, so too it has commanded him to be lowly and empty at heart, as it says: 'My heart is a void within me' (Pa. 109:22). Nor should he treat Israel with overbearing haughtiness, as it says, 'he should not consider himself better than his fellows' (Deut. 17:20).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1 – 18:32)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "…for the entire congregation are all holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's assembly?" [Num. 16:3].

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

According to Korach, if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity. The era of the old guard rule (Moses' family) must come to an end; Korach's family must be given its chance to express its inherent holiness!

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

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

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

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

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

In contrast, Korach maintains that the status quo is holy – because nothing need change, grow, or develop. This is, in fact, the meaning of Korach's name: the Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean "bald" – no hair grows on a bald head – or "ice" – no vegetation developed during the Ice Age. "As is his name, so is he." Korach rejects the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he is cynically scornful of one's ability to grow and develop and change and inspire. This mistaken worldview is the core flaw of Korach's rebellion.

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Korach - Tammuz 5781
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

The King's Prerogative

The entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You put to death the nation of Hashem!' (Bamidbar 17:6)

On the day after the earth miraculously swallowed up Korach and his followers, a most astounding confrontation took place: The rest of Bnei Yisrael accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths of their fellow Jews. This is difficult to understand in light of the fact that the deaths of the rebels were clearly the result of a divinely ordained miracle. Moshe and Aharon had not been the ones to kill them; it was Hashem Himself who had done so in a miraculous fashion! How could Bnei Yisroel level such an accusation?

Before the final confrontation in which the rebellious people were killed, Moshe announced, "With this you will know that Hashem has sent me to do all these deeds, for it was not from my heart. If these people die like all men, and the fate of all men befalls them, then Hashem has not sent me. But if Hashem creates a new creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that they have, and they descend to the grave alive, then you will know that these people angered Hashem" (Bamidbar 16:28-30). Thus, Moshe announced that only a miracle would substantiate his claim to be a legitimate agent of Hashem. If that miracle

did not occur, the validity of the entire Torah would be called into question.

Shockingly, Moshe was thus risking the entire Jewish nation's belief in the Torah on the basis that Hashem would perform a miracle for him. This is problematic; the Chechenover Rebbe points out, the conspirators could have spared themselves by doing teshuvah. How could Moshe take the risk that they might repent and avert the miracle he had promised, thereby jeopardizing the entire nation's faith?

The answer is that in this case teshuvah would not have worked to save them from death. Moshe was not predicting that Hashem would perform a miracle in order to demonstrate who was correct. Rather, he was invoking his authority as the king of Bnei Yisroel to have those who rebelled against his authority put to death. The Torah gives a king that right, and Moshe exercised that right by asking Hashem to carry out the sentence through a miracle. The sentence of death itself, though, was based on his royal prerogative.

In the Torah's judicial system, no sinner can save himself by repenting from a punishment imposed by man. In fact, we are required to urge every person who is about to be executed to engage in teshuvah, even though the execution will not be cancelled as a result. Clearly, the purpose of the teshuvah is to have a beneficial effect on his soul in the World to Come, even though the Beis Din is still required to carry out the sentence of death. Likewise, Korach and his cohorts were unable to save themselves by repenting, because their deaths were the result of Moshe's decree, not a divinely imposed punishment. Moshe simply asked Hashem to carry out that decree for him.

This explains the basis of the people's complaint; while a king has the right to have a rebel against his authority put to death, he is not required to do so. They therefore accused Moshe of unnecessarily causing the rebels' deaths, since he could have disregarded their crimes and refrained from calling for them to be killed. Even though the death sentence was ultimately carried out by Hashem Himself, it was Moshe's prerogative to waive it.

Your Wish is My Command

This week's parsha recounts the events surrounding the uprising instigated by Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu regarding Moshe's appointment of Aharon as Kohen Gadol. Essentially, Korach argued that Moshe was not commanded by Hashem to appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol; Moshe had done so of his own discretion. Thus, Korach seems to be insinuating that Moshe had fabricated the Divine command for Aharon's appointment.

This is shocking; if Korach could imply that Moshe had not actually received a command from Hashem that he claimed to have been given, then the veracity of the entire Torah, by extension, could be called into question. In other words, who's to say what Hashem commanded and what Moshe made up on his own? If the people could believe that Moshe had fabricated one Divine commandment for his own benefit, then they could also believe that he had fabricated the entire Torah as well.

Korach was a remarkable talmid chacham and hailed from one of the most prestigious and influential families. How is it possible that one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish nation could question such a fundamental underpinning of the faith, especially when doing so would essentially subvert the entire experience of Har Sinai and call into question the authenticity of Judaism itself?

After the Torah was given at Har Sinai, Hashem told Moshe that the entire Jewish people should "return to their tents," but He added a different command to Moshe himself: "And you, stay here with Me." The Gemara (Shabbos 87a) explains that the rest of the nation had been enjoined to abstain from marital relations while the Torah was given, but they were now freed to resume their normal family lives. Moshe, on the other hand, was told to separate permanently from his wife. The Gemara relates that this idea actually originated with Moshe himself: Since he was at a high level of prophecy, he wanted to make himself constantly available to receive prophetic messages.

Tosafos (ad loc) explains that the Gemara infers this from the fact that Aharon and Miriam later questioned the propriety of Moshe's decision. Since they suggested that it was improper, it is clear that the idea must have come from Moshe, for they would never have made such a statement about an idea that originated with Hashem.

This points to an astounding concept: It is possible that Hashem may make a statement to a person not because it is His wish, but rather because the person desires it. In this case, Moshe felt that it was correct to separate from his wife. Aharon and Miriam disagreed with his decision, even though Hashem Himself had confirmed it, as it were, by directing Moshe to do so. Clearly, they felt that Hashem's command could be interpreted as a mere "rubber stamp" for Moshe's decision; it did not indicate Hashem's approval of it at all.

Parents often face similar dilemmas with their children. Many times parents disagree with their children's decisions; they may feel that their children are choosing a career that is not suitable for them, passing up an opportunity that they should not forego, or otherwise making imprudent choices. In these situations, the natural inclination of a parent is to attempt to control his child's decisions or pressure the child to make the choice that he deems correct. This, however, is a major mistake. Of course, it should go without saying, that if a child makes a decision that harms himself or someone else, his parents should intervene to stop him. However, in most situations parents must support decisions made by their children. This is exactly what Korach claimed to have happened. According to Korach, Moshe wanted to appoint his brother and Hashem merely supported it, just as He did when Moshe decided that it was proper to separate from his wife. This should not be mistaken as a commandment from Hashem. Korach wasn't calling into question the veracity of the Torah, merely the appointment of Moshe's brother as Kohen Gadol.

Did You Know...

This week we read about Moshe's first cousin (Korach), the rebellion he started, and how it ultimately led to his demise and that of his cohorts. However, how much do we really know about him, other than his relation to Moshe? Here are some interesting facts about Korach.

1. Korach was extremely wealthy, he had 300 donkeys just to carry the keys to his storehouses. He seemingly had found one of three hidden storehouses of Yosef's wealth (he had amassed almost all the money in the world from the famine) (Sanhedrin 110a).
2. According to Midrash, Korach was one of Pharaoh's officials (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:1).
3. There are opinions that Korach's rebellion took place before the story with the spies (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:1; Rabbeinu Bachye).
4. There are other opinions that say this portion in the Torah is chronologically correct and that the rebellion happened because of the spies and the decree that they were going to die in the desert (Abarbanel 16:14).
5. Korach's wife was the one who convinced him to stand up to Moshe in the first place (Sanhedrin 110a). He probably wouldn't have done it otherwise, because as we are constantly reminded, behind all great men…
6. The crevice that literally swallowed Korach was one of the ten things Hashem created on the eve of the first Shabbos Bein Hashmashos (Pirkei Avos 5:6).
7. On the way down to Gehenom, a place of refuge was made for them, where they sang to Hashem (Sanhedrin 110a).

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www.ravaviner.com

Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Traveling to Space

Q: Is it permissible to travel to space?

A: One should not leave Eretz Yisrael

Making Change from Tzedekah Box

Q: Is it permissible to make change from a Tzedakah box?

A: It is permissible. Some are strict to give a little Tzedakah at the time (The Brisker Rav was strict not to do so. His son, Ha-Rav Meir Ha-Levi Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshivat Brisk in Yerushalayim, explains that even if two people have the same exact watch, they would not want to switch since each watch belongs to the owner. And so too regarding the money in the Tzedakah box, since it is not the same money. In the book 'De-Chazitei Le-Rebbe Meir' Volume 1, p. 307. Although perhaps one can

explain that there is a difference between an object which always remains with a person and money, which frequently changes hands).
Reserve Duty in Tzahal
Q: I was exempt from reserve duty because of a wound. If they allow me to return, should I do so?
A: Certainly. It is a great Mitzvah.
Working
Q: Is there an ethical value to working?
A: Yes. 1. To earn a livelihood with respect. 2. To help build the world.
Corona Miracle
Q: Should we say Hallel regarding the miracle in the State of Israel that Corona has disappeared within a year when other countries are still in the midst of the pandemic?
A: No. Rather: 1. Repent. 2. Pray. 3. Give Tzedakah. 4. Give thanks to the Prime Minister. 5. Give thanks to the doctors.
Seperation Wall as Eruv
Q: Is Yehudah and Shomron considered today as one place with regards to an Eruv since there is the Separation Wall?
A: No. The wall does not encompass the entire area, it is not like a fence around a Yishuv, the area is huge and includes fields, and many other reasons. Incidentally, the way, the Separation Wall is part of the Eruv in Yerushalayim.
Soldier who Jumps on Hand Grenade
Q: Why isn't a soldier who jumps on a hand grenade to save his fellow soldiers consider a suicide?
A: It is self-sacrifice for the sake of others. All of Tzahal is based on self-sacrifice.
We are Pregnant
Q: How should I say it: My wife is pregnant or "we" are pregnant?
A: It does not matter.
Amen for Non-Jew's Blessing?
Q: Should one say Amen over a non-Jew's blessing over food?
A: No. It is an Amen said in vain.
Learning Rav Kook
Q: Why is it so important to learn Rav Kook's works?
A: He is the special Divine agent for building the National and individual soul during the time of our National revival.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 12 June 2021 / 2 Tamuz 5781
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Korach
Parashat
A "Shayne Gelechte"
"And Korach took..." (16:1)
One of the few maxims in my sparse Yiddish lexicon is "a shayne gelechte." Literally translated, it means ""A fine laugh," but idiomatically we would translate it something like, "If it didn't make you cry, you'd have to laugh."
The Israeli political scene is a shayne gelechte. I've never been political, and my indifference — and sometimes hostility — to politics and politicians has been borne by a political system where we are either about to have the fifth election in two years or a coalition government so broadly-based that if you were to stand at the left-hand side of it, you'd need a telescope to see the right. And in between there's a vast floppy underbelly waiting to crash down on a hapless electorate.
By rights, this Holy Land should be ruled by those who are the least selfish, the least power-hungry, the most noble and the most honest.
We love democracy, but, presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I'm not sure how many of us would submit to extensive invasive surgery based on a straw-poll taken on Twitter or Facebook. The idea that if you ask enough people a question, you're bound to come up with the right answer, is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach that "The wisdom of the Torah is the opposite of the man in the street."
Our esteemed Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Nota Schiller, shlita, once observed: "The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy of opinion." Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for your opinion to be significant, it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the most expert.
And who are the most expert? To me, there is no perceptible difference between Mount Everest and K2, but K2 knows that Everest is taller than it. And thus it is with our Gedolei HaDor. When it comes to the great ones of the generation, each one knows who is more outstanding and in which areas he excels.
I suppose you could translate the phrase shayne gelechte with the English word "farce" — and that about sums up the state of the Israeli political system.
In 1887, Hon. John Dalberg-Acton wrote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it."
Our great Torah Sages sanctify the positions they hold, and not the reverse.
Possibly one of the most egregious power-grabs in history is revealed in this week's Torah portion. Korach, posing as a champion of the masses with consummate political skill, engineers a rebellion purely for his own ends, and manages to convince, among others, two hundred and fifty of the most august and important leaders of the people.
Joseph Goebbels (y"sh) said, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus, by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State."
If that isn't a shayne gelechte, I don't know what is.

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Can Everybody Be Somebody?
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
The Jewish community in the United States of America is pleased and proud to live in a democracy. What is a democracy? It is often described as a society in which all are equal. But this description falls short of the mark. Because obviously we all are not equal. Some of us are stronger, some wiser, some wealthier than others. We are not equally endowed with talents at birth, nor do we all partake in equal sets of circumstances as we grow and develop.
A more precise and useful definition is this one from the Webster's dictionary: "Democracy is the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment, or the practice of this principle." The dictionary makes it quite clear. We are not equal, but we are entitled to equal treatment and to equal opportunities. Whether we take advantage of these opportunities is a matter of personal will, and not a reflection of the justice or injustice of the society at large.
The above definition helps us understand that while we are all equally entitled to be members of a democratic society, we are not all equally qualified to fill all of the roles necessary for that society to function. We are not all qualified to be leaders, we are not all qualified to be teachers, we are not even all qualified to be soldiers.
In the Torah portions which we have been reading the past several weeks, we have been observing a society in the making. Not a democratic society in the contemporary sense, but one which was designed to be fair and equitable and to allow for the fullest possible spiritual expression of every individual within it.
In this week's Torah portion, Korach, we learn of the first challenge to this society in formation. Korach, a close relative of Moses and Aaron, challenges their roles as leader and high priest. He also advocates what might be mistaken for a democracy, if we are to understand democracy in the fashion outlined in the first few sentences of this essay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Judaism teaches us that although we are all equally endowed with the capacity for holiness, with the potential for spirituality, the achievement of those objectives is not easy. Spirituality is not obtained by a moment on a mountaintop, or by fleeting inspirational experiences. Spirituality, Jewish spirituality, can only be attained by hard work and painful self-sacrifice.

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

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

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

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message Korach 5781-2021
“The Origin of the ‘Big Lie’”

(updated and revised from Korach 5762-2002)
Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week’s Torah portion, parashat Korach, we read of Korach and his rebellion against G-d, Moses and Aaron.

Although Korach was himself a member of the noble tribe of Levi, he persuades Dathan, and Abiram and On, of the tribe of Reuven, and 250 leaders of the people of Israel to join in his rebellion. They confronted Moses and Aaron and demanded (Numbers 16:3): “You, [Moses and Aaron], have taken too much for yourselves! After all, the entire congregation is holy,” “and why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d?”

Our rabbis suggest many reasons for Korach’s rebellion. In order to explain the juxtaposition between the end of the previous Torah portion, Shelach, which deals with the theme of tzitzit, and this week’s Torah portion, the rabbis propose that Korach, the ultimate rationalist, could not abide by the fact that Jewish law requires that a talit, a prayer shawl, that was entirely made of blue threads, must have tzitzit fringes attached. Others suggest that Korach felt that he was treated with disrespect when a younger cousin, Elitzaphan, the son of Uziel, was chosen to serve as the Prince of the tribe of Levi.

Whatever his reason, Korach was a brilliant provocateur who was able to stir up the passions of the masses, convincing the hordes to believe that he was rebelling for the sake of the common people, instead of for his own personal benefit.

Parashat Korach is particularly abundant in Midrashim, and many legends enhance the already dramatic narrative. However, one particular legend is extraordinarily revealing and prescient.

The Midrash relates that Korach attempted to incite the people to join his rebellion against Moses, by railing against the gifts and tributes that were given to the priests, who were of course from the family of Aaron and Moses. According to the Midrash, Korach went from house to house telling the Israelites the story that he had invented of the “oppressed widow.”

There lived in my vicinity a widow with two orphan daughters, who owned a field, whose yield was just sufficient for them to barely keep body and soul together. When this woman set out to plow her field, Moses appeared and said: ‘Thou shalt not plow with an ox and donkey together.’ When she began to sow, Moses appeared and said: ‘Thou shalt not plant diverse seeds.’ When the first fruits showed in the poor widow’s field, Moses appeared and bade her bring the fruits to the priests, for to them are due ‘the first of all the fruit of the earth.’ And when at length, the time came for her to cut the produce down, Moses appeared and ordered her ‘not to wholly reap the corners of the field, nor to gather the gleanings of the harvest, but to leave them for the poor.’ When she had done all that Moses had bidden, and was about to thrash the grain, Moses appeared once more and said: ‘Give me the heave offering, and the first and the second tithes that all belong to the priests.’ After the deduction of all the tributes that Moses had imposed upon her, when at last the poor woman became aware of the fact that she could not now possibly maintain herself from the yield of the field, she sold the field, and with the proceeds purchased ewes, in the hope that she might now, undisturbed, have the benefit of the wool as well as of the younglings of the sheep. She was, however, mistaken. When the first youngling of the sheep was born, Aaron appeared and demanded it, for the first-born belonged to the priest. She had a similar experience with the wool. At shearing time, Aaron reappeared and demanded ‘the first of the fleece of the sheep,’ which, according to Moses’ law, was his. But, not content with this, he reappeared later and demanded one sheep out of every ten as a tithe, to which again, according to the law, he had claim.

This, however, was again too much for the long-suffering woman, and she slaughtered the sheep, assuming that finally she might now feel herself secure, in full possession of the meat. But, she was mistaken! Aaron appeared, and basing his claim on the Torah, demanded the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw. ‘Alas!’ exclaimed the woman, ‘the slaughtering of the sheep did not deliver me out of your hands! Let the meat then be consecrated to the sanctuary.’ Aaron said, ‘Everything devoted to G-d is mine. It shall then be all mine.’ He departed taking

with him the meat of the sheep and leaving behind the widow and her daughters weeping bitterly. Such men," said Korach, concluding his tale, "are Moses and Aaron who pass their cruel measures as divine law." (Based on Legends of the Jews, by Louis Ginzberg)

It was with these words, and with this heart-rending story, that Korach managed to seduce thousands of Israelites to join in his rebellion.

Eventually, through the use of holy incense, Moses proves that only Moses is truly G-d's chosen. As the earth opens and swallows Korach and his immediate followers, fire bursts forth and devours the 250 men who sacrificed the counterfeit incense.

Like many enemies of Israel, including the Hamas terrorists of today, Korach was a genius at public relations and marketing. His lies were extraordinary, but always based on some truth. In fact, everything that Korach said about the priestly gifts and the tithes were absolutely true, but reported in such a distorted manner, that it resulted in dramatic incitement and rebellion.

According to the Torah, when Moses ultimately confronted Korach before the people, he said (Numbers 16:29-30): If these people [Korach and his cohorts] die a natural death, then G-d did not send me. But, if G-d creates a special creation and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up, then you will know that these people have indeed provoked G-d.

The Midrash elaborates, reporting, that just as Moses was speaking, a wondrous image appeared before the People of Israel, and behold the nation was dwelling in the land that G-d had promised them, working the fields. The Levites, the converts, the orphaned children, the widows, the poor, and all those who languished, were coming to the fields to eat and be satiated. Whoever possessed a field or a vineyard, would come out to greet all those who were hungry and all those lacking bread, calling out to them: "Come my brother, come to me and I'll feed you, and give you to drink, and we will rejoice together in the bounty that G-d has given us." In fact, the more that the nation of Israel increased its tithes and left the corners of the fields and the fallen stalks for the poor and the strangers, and its heave offerings and tithes and the first shearing of the sheep to the priest, the more G-d opened His treasure trove of goodness, the heavens, to give the people rain in its proper time and to bless all the works of their hands.

In this truthful image that appeared before the nation of Israel, the earth brought forth its bounty, and the trees bore their fruit, the harvest season extended into the planting season, and the planting season into the harvest season. And, the wine vats were full with wine, and the oil storage overflowed, unable to contain all that had been produced.

The Midrash says that when Korach and his rebellious cohorts beheld the utopian vision that had appeared before them, they heard G-d's voice saying, (Psalms 145:20), G-d will protect all who love Him, (who do acts of loving-kindness and justice) and will destroy all evildoers.

At that very moment, the earth opened its mouth as holes appeared all over the ground. Korach and all the rebels were swallowed by the earth and were gathered to one place. As they tumbled into oblivion, they cried out in a resounding voice, מֹשֶׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, "Moses is true and his Torah is true!" The earth then covered them, and they were lost forever.

Many of our enemies, and even a few of our misguided Jewish brothers and sisters, employ these tactics, the tactic of the "Big Lie," to attack our people, Israel. They either harp on a single individual's misdeeds, implying that all Jews are corrupt, or they simply fabricate lies about Jews. Our Jewish brothers and sisters who are, most often, ignorant of tradition, frequently find an obtuse verse or obscure rabbinic saying onto which they latch in order to justify their apostasy and faithlessness, making little effort to see the beauty that often resides in the very elements that they criticize.

The critics of the State of Israel conveniently forget that Israel accepted the original UN resolution allowing for the establishment of the State of Israel, but that the fledgling state was immediately attacked by five invading Arab armies. They forget that the "West Bank" was under complete control of the Jordanians for 17 years, but no Palestinian State was established, and that Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered Yassir Arafat 98% of the West Bank land and a capital in Jerusalem, but the offer was rejected.

Even in the recent battle with Hamas in Gaza, the media constantly reports the "disproportionate" numbers of Palestinian casualties (254 Palestinian civilians vs 12 Israeli), even though Hamas itself has admitted that 80 of the dead were "militants." Israel claims that 200 of those "civilians" were terrorists, and that many other Palestinian civilians, women and children were killed by Hamas' own errant rockets, but Israel's statistics are never reported by the media. Never is it mentioned that Hamas's "marketing" strategy is to purposely use civilians and children as human shields! Instead of building bomb shelters to protect its civilians, Hamas cynically spent billions that it collected from international donors to build hundreds of kilometers of underground tunnels where its "courageous" fighters could hide while the numerous dead women and children served as their "victims" for the photographers and the international press.

Is there any country in the world that would have allowed over 4,000 deadly missiles aimed at civilians to rain down on its major population centers without a response? Israel always makes extraordinary efforts to prevent civilian casualties. Most other countries at war make no effort at all, resulting in thousands of civilian victims, but only Israel is condemned! Only Israel is forbidden to defend itself! Only Israel is constantly denounced as a most horrendous, unethical country, frequently accused of committing war crimes and Nazi-like atrocities.

To counter this misinformation, Jews need to be knowledgeable in our responses to these untoward attacks. We must educate ourselves sufficiently to make certain that we are in a position to show our enemies, and our Jewish brothers and sisters, the true picture of G-d, and of our extraordinary religion, so that, hopefully, before the earth opens to swallow them, the entire world will cry out, מֹשֶׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, "Moses is true and his Torah is true," and, thereby, spare the world much unnecessary pain and suffering.

May you be blessed.

Drasha Parshas Korach - Blind Ambition
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Love is blind. So is hate and any principle that begins to shade the intellect with emotion. This week, in what appears to be the worst ideological division of the Jewish people after the Exodus, a litmus test of human nature proved that the great divide bordered more on ego than on principle.

Korach, a cousin of Moshe and a brilliant man in his own right, began a rebellion that challenged the leadership and divine appointment of both Moshe and Ahron. In addition to his own family, Korach's iconoclastic actions inspired 250 Jewish leaders to denounce publicly the leadership of Moshe and Ahron. Foremost among the self-appointed detractors were two men with a history of vindictive activities toward Moshe – Dassan and Aviram. Back in Egypt, when Moshe killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an innocent Jew, these men threatened to inform the Egyptian authorities.

But Moshe wanted to deal with them. As leader of two million people, he could have laughed at the complaints of a minute fraction of the population, but he didn't. He reached out to Dassan and Aviram and asked them to come and discuss their qualms with him. His request was met with a barrage of insults.

"Even if you gouge out our eyes – we shall not meet!" they responded (Numbers 16:14)

I was always amazed at this most arrogant response. Why did these men, who obviously were stubborn, arrogant, and supercilious, respond in a self-deprecating manner? Why did they suggest the horrific infliction of eye-gouging upon themselves? Would it not be enough to respond, even to the worst of enemies, "we will not come?" What connection does the loss of vision have with their refusal?

Reb Gimpel, a travelling salesman, developed an illness in a small village far from his home and was prescribed with a cure that entailed eating of non-kosher food. A foreigner in that town, he decided to ask the local rabbi if he was permitted to eat the medicine.

The gentile doctor did not know where the rabbi lived and suggested that Reb Gimpel ask the local butcher. Reb Gimpel went into the butcher shop. "Excuse me," he asked the burly meat vendor, "do you know where I can find your rabbi?" "The rabbi!" sneered the butcher, "why would a respectable-looking man like yourself need our rabbi?" The man was puzzled but continued to explain. "I'd like to ask him something. "Ask him something!" mocked the butcher. "Our rabbi doesn't know the difference between a horse and a cow! You're wasting your time! Ask the chazzan where he lives, I have no reason to tell you."
The shocked man went to the chazzan's home. "Excuse me," he asked. Do you know where the rabbi lives?"
"The rabbi?" asked the cantor in horror. "Why in the world would you want to meet that ignoramus? Surely you don't want to ask him a question! I wouldn't want to be party to your misfortune. Better ask the mohel."
Frustrated the poor man went to the home of the mohel where once again he was accosted with a barrage of insults and put-downs. Finally, however, the mohel acquiesced and directed the man to the rabbi's home. The man entered the threshold and before he even shook the rabbi's hand he exclaimed, "Listen, I don't know you, and you don't me. I came here to ask one question, but I will ask you something totally different. Why are you the rabbi here? The butcher thinks you're a thief, the chazzan thinks you're an ignoramus, and the mohel loathes you. Why in the world do you remain the rabbi of this town?"
The rabbi looked up from his bifocals and smiled. "Ah! The insults, the abuse and the criticism. But you know what: for a little honor it's all worth it!"
As the proverbial rabble-rousers of all time, Dassan and Aviram were preaching profound insight into the laws of arrogance. When one is set on a self-fulfilling mission of squabbling, as corrupt and perverted as his judgement is, so is his vision. He is blind to the critics, blind to the world, and worst of all, blind to his own self. Once a man is blind, you can gouge his eyes and he will not notice. Only those with a pure sense of mission, cherish the vision that lets them see a situation from every angle. Even if it is not their own. While Moshe, the leader of the entire nation asks to meet his worst enemies and discuss their gripes, thy refuse and would rather be blind to any criticism.
Good Shabbos

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Korach: Premeditated ritual entrapment?
Ben-Tzion Spitz
It is a revenge the devil sometimes takes upon the virtuous, that he entraps them by the force of the very passion they have suppressed and think themselves superior to. George Santayana
Korach, together with accomplices Datan and Aviram, instigate a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the sons of Amram. They encourage 250 distinguished leaders of Israel to protest against the seeming nepotism of Moses, the de facto leader, and his brother Aaron, the High Priest.
Moses offers an unusual solution to their protest. He suggests that the 250 rebels come in front of the Tabernacle, each with his own fire pan with burning incense on it. Aaron will also come with his, and God will decide directly who is worthy of the designation of High Priest.
The 250 leaders come the next morning with their fire pans filled with burning incense. Aaron also arrives. Besides holes miraculously opening up in the ground and swallowing up Datan, Aviram, and their entourage, God sends a fire that kills each of the 250 rebellious leaders holding their incense burning fire pans. Aaron, Moses, and all other non-participants are unharmed.
However, the people of Israel are furious with Moses and Aaron and accuse them of murder. The Bechor Shor on Numbers 17:6 takes the accusation seriously and tries to understand what's behind the murder accusation.
He explains that the accusers felt that Moses knew incense burning was a dangerous act. Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, had died by the hand of God for offering unauthorized incense. The rebel leaders had trusted Moses when he told them to bring their incense, but the accusers surmised that Moses must have known it would lead to their death, that handling incense was a death sentence to those who came in contact with it, except for Aaron who must have had some immunity.
God is not amused by the constant challenging of the leadership He chose. Having lost patience, He strikes the nation of Israel with an insanely fast-hitting plague. Moses, realizing God had struck, sends Aaron with incense in his ladle right into the middle of where the plague had started. Aaron rushes in and stops the plague, standing right in between the dead and the living; giving a very palpable demonstration that incense, correctly used, is not only not dangerous, but can save lives. In a matter of moments, 14,700 had died from the plague. Aaron and his incense were the only things that stood between the dead and the survivors.
May we realize the value of rituals as well as the value of good deeds.
Dedication - On the marriage of our niece Leora Spitz to Sammy Landesman. Mazal Tov!
Shabbat Shalom
Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
Parashat Korach 5781 - The Boundaries of Holiness
Moses was horrified by the rebellion since its essence was not only against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, but was also a rebellion against the leadership of G-d. Time after time, the nation had seen that all of Moses' actions were commanded by G-d and that he was chosen by Divine choice to lead the Jewish nation. Furthermore, Moses was appalled by the rebels since this leadership did not carry any special privileges. He had not so much as requested a donkey to ride on. On the contrary, Moses, as leader, carried the burden of leadership, worried about the nation's needs, and mediated their complaints with G-d.
Moses wanted to solve the dispute in a divine manner. He invited the rebels to come the following day to the Mishkan and bring an incense offering, ketoret, before G-d, along with Aaron. Whoever's ketoret would be accepted by G-d would be proven to be the priest, the kohen, G-d wanted. The group of rebels, despite knowing the severity of offering unwanted ketoret in the Mishkan, arrived to offer it anyway. The rebellion ended tragically: those who offered the ketoret were burned in fire, the ground opened under the tents of Korach and the other rebellion leaders, swallowing them.
In the parasha, we read some of the claims of Korach and his people:
They assembled against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Numbers 16, 3)
Korach and his companions challenged the religious and leadership hierarchy, claiming that the entire nation is holy and G-d resides in their midst, so therefore there is no reason for authority to be held by one person, and there is no reason to limit the work in the Mishkan to one family. Rather, the entire nation can serve as kohanim.
In the midrash, our sages reveal another claim raised by Korach and his people. This claim is hinted at by the proximity of the rebellion's description to the commandment of tzitzit and techelet at the end of the previous parasha, Shelach.
What is written above the matter? "Speak unto the Children of Israel and tell them to make tassels (tzizit) for themselves.'" Korah quickly said to Moses, "In the case of a prayer shawl (tallit) which is all blue, what is the rule about it being exempt from [having] the tassel?" Moses said to him, "[Such a prayer shawl] is required to have the tassels." Korah said to him, "Would not a prayer shawl which is all blue exempt itself, when four [blue] threads exempt it? In the case of a house which is full of [scriptural] books, what is the rule about it being exempt it from [having] the mezuzah?" [Moses] said to him, "[Such a house] is

required to have the mezuzah." [Korah] said to him, "Since the whole Torah has two hundred and seventy-five parashiot in it, and they do not exempt the house [from having the mezuzah], would the one parasha which is in the mezuzah exempt the house?" [He also] said to him, "These are things about which you have not been commanded. Rather you are inventing them [by taking them] out of your own heart." (Numbers Rabbah 18, 3)

In Parashat Shelach, we are commanded to tie fringes to the corners of clothing, some of which should be techelet, a shade of blue. According to the sages of the midrash, Korach argued with Moses regarding a tallit which is all blue: Korach thought it should be exempt from the commandment of techelet, since it is entirely blue anyway, but Moses thought it still needed to have techelet strings tied to it. A similar argument ensued regarding the commandment of the mezuzah, writing two parshiot from the Torah and affixing it to the door frame. Korach claimed that if there is a house full of Torah scrolls, there is no point in affixing a mezuzah to the doorframe, while Moses thought that even in a home like that, we are still commanded to put up a mezuzah.

We should delve deeper to understand the crux of the argument between Moses and Korach: What is Korach's basic claim and why did the sages of the midrash see it as the foundation of his rebellion against Moses' leadership and Aaron's priesthood?

It seems that Korach's claim in this argument about the mezuzah is similar to his claim mentioned in the Torah that "the entire congregation are all holy." According to Korach, G-d's greatness fills and rules over the entire earthly space, and therefore, holiness can not be restricted to specific people or to a specific space. Based on Korach's concept, an item of clothing that is entirely blue – representing the heavens – expresses godliness in the world much better than a few threads tied to its corners. And a home filled with Torah scrolls does not need one small mezuzah affixed to its doorframe.

However, G-d's will is completely different. G-d wants the world to be the kingdom of humans, as we say in Hallel: "The heavens are heavens of the Lord, but the earth He gave to the children of men" (Psalms 115, 16). But even within the kingdom of humans, G-d wants there to be special people whose job it is to worship G-d and express His presence: the kohanim in the ancient world, and religious authorities today; as well as touches of G-d's presence with every person: at the entrances of their homes, on the corners of their clothes, in the Mishkan, in synagogues, and in moral interactions between people.

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Rav Kook Torah
Chanan Morrison
Solomon's Predicament

After King Solomon finished building the Temple in Jerusalem, there was an unforeseen complication. Everything was done; the structure and all of its vessels were complete. All that remained was the final act of placing the ancient Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies.

It should have been simple. Except that the Temple gates were closed shut and refused to open.

Solomon pleaded to God with twenty-four supplications, and the Temple gates finally opened. From this incident, the Sages learned that in times of great need — such as on days of fasting during a severe drought — our prayers should contain not eighteen but twenty-four blessings, like Solomon's prayer.

What is the significance of the number twenty-four? And why was placing the Ark inside the Holy of Holies such an important event?

Twenty-Four Blessings

The Temple and the Ark correspond to two major themes in Judaism. The holy Temple is the focus of Israel's avodah, service of God. The Ark, on the other hand, containing the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, represents the Torah and its revelation to the Jewish people.

The final act of completing the Temple was to place the Ark inside the Holy of Holies. This was a highly significant act, for it combined two primary values: Torah and Divine service. More to the point: it teaches that without the Ark, the Temple is incomplete.

This is not just about the Temple service. It is a fundamental principle about all forms of Divine service. Without Torah, without being informed by Divine revelation, it is impossible to know the proper way to serve God. We cannot fulfill our moral obligations, nor can we realize our spiritual aspirations, only on the basis of intellect and logic. Why is this?

It may be possible to deduce major moral principles using our powers of reason. But without Torah, it is impossible to know how to serve God and follow an ethical path in all of the diverse circumstances of life.

This is the significance of the number twenty-four. There are twenty-four hours in the day, so twenty-four represents the various situations that we find ourselves in: waking up, at work, at home, and so on. Each hour finds us in a different situation, requiring its own special rules of conduct. These varied circumstances underline the need for detailed Divine instruction — i.e., Torah.

Thus, when placing the Torah ark inside the Temple, King Solomon prayed with twenty-four supplications. He understood that without the Torah's guidance in all aspects of life, it is impossible to attain a true service of God.

Appropriate Piety

If so, perhaps this type of prayer, a prayer with twenty-four blessings, is relevant for all days of the year. Why only on fast days?

A fast day is a time dedicated to contemplation and refining one's traits and deeds. At such times, it is especially important that our spiritual growth be rooted in the counsel of Torah, and not solely on our intellect. On a fast day, one may be inclined to accept new obligations - obligations that are not in accord with the Torah's teachings. Extra piety is not always a good thing; it may also lead to undesirable results. For this reason, there is an ancient custom to read from the Torah on fast days, indicating that our spiritual efforts should be enlightened by Torah guidance.

Our Feet Will Not Stumble

This is what the psalmist taught,

תּוֹרַת אֱ-לֹהָיו בְּלִבּוֹ לֹא תִמְעַד אֲשֻׁרָיו.

"The Torah of His God is in his heart; his feet will not stumble." (Psalm 37:31)

The two parts of the verse, Rav Kook explained, are cause and effect. It is because the "Torah is in our hearts" — because we base our moral decisions on the Torah's teachings — that our "feet will not stumble."

One who is firmly rooted in Torah values will avoid the errors of those who rely solely on their intellect and powers of reasoning.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, on Berachot 29, IV:45)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Korach
פרשת קרח תשפ"א
ואון בן פלת
And Ohn ben Peles. (16:1)

Two women: One catalyzed her husband's downfall, while the other saved her husband from destruction and eternal infamy. Korach and his henchmen, Dasan, Aviram and Ohn ben Peles, together with the support of the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin*, were bent on usurping the leadership of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 109b) teach that Ohn was saved by his wife. She asked him, "What difference does it make to you which man (Moshe or Korach) leads the nation? At the end of the day, you will still remain a lackey – not someone who is in charge." She then gave him enough wine to drink to make him sufficiently sleepy. When the men came to pick him up, she knew that they would insist on waking him. Therefore, she sat by the doorway of her tent and loosened the braids of her hair. Religious men would not gaze upon the uncovered hair of a married woman. (These same men had no problem with slander and heresy.) Since these men were careful about modesty, they retreated when they saw her sitting there.

Korach also had a wife. Her plans for her husband were quite different. Indeed, she egged him on, claiming that Moshe demonstrated

no respect for him, as he took every honor either for himself or for his family. She imbued her husband with a venomous hatred for what Moshe was doing, thereby catalyzing him to dispute our quintessential leader, a grave error which cost him his physical and eternal life.

Two influential women – one incited downfall; the other rescued her husband. Ohn's wife questioned her husband: "What difference does it make who is on top – Moshe or Korach? In any event you are second fiddle." Her remark suggested that he deserved better. He was an honorable man who had leadership qualities. It was not worth disputing Moshe if he had nothing to benefit from it. Let him go back to the *bais hamedrash* and learn until an opportunity for a decent position would avail itself.

Korach's wife took a negative approach by beating up on her husband, putting him down, claiming that Moshe had taken everything from him. He deserved more and better. The only way was to take on Moshe and dispute his leadership. Did she really care about her husband, or did she care only about herself? Korach's wife always looked for the negative, focusing on how everything Moshe did demeaned her husband. Ohn's wife was practical. She cared about her husband. Korach's wife, however, cared only about herself.

While Ohn's wife was a good woman who cared deeply about her husband and his esteem, we are unaware of her personal qualities in imbuing him to achieve greatness. [This is not meant to imply that a woman who looks out for her husband and ensures his respectable treatment by others is not manifesting a remarkable trait.] At the end of the day, Ohn's wife did not effect a positive change in her husband. Without her last minute intervention, he, too, would have joined the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin* in their premature demise. We do, however, find another woman in the Torah who had a positive influence on her husband, imbuing him with the strength of character to decide on his own that what others were doing was evil.

The Torah relates that prior to Moshe sending off the *meraglim*, spies, he prayed for Yehoshua. Why did he not pray for Kalev, who was left to go alone to Chevron to pray for himself at the graves of the Patriarchs? Surely, Moshe was not playing favorites. *Targum Yonasan* explains that Moshe feared for Yehoshua due to the latter's humility. He was concerned that his humility might cause him to question himself and assume that he was wrong, thus buckling under the weight of the majority of the spies. *Kalev ruach acheres imo*; "A different spirit was with him" (*Bamidbar* 14:24). The commentators say this alludes to his wife, whose attitude and spirit influenced his personality. Kalev's wife was none other than Miriam *HaNeviyah*, sister of Moshe and Aharon.

As a member of *Klal Yisrael's* leadership triumvirate, she was no stranger to bold action and resisting external pressure. She would not fall sway to the harmful diatribe of the spies. As a young girl, she risked her life to protect her baby brother. As a midwife, she defied Pharaoh. When she felt her father, Amram, had rendered a *halachic* decision that undermined *Klal Yisrael's* future, she spoke up. On the other hand, as Moshe and Aharon's sister, she combined their exemplary humility and love of the Jewish People, demonstrating firm, decisive action. She fought for the people to survive after the sin of the Golden Calf, but was quick to excoriate Korach for fomenting dissension. *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita,* feels that Moshe relied on the influence of his sister rubbing off of Kalev. Thus, he did not feel that it was necessary to *daven* for him. Kalev had a great mentor.

We derive from here that the right wife does not have to take up "arms" to protect her husband. The right wife influences and – in the ideal situation – changes and makes him into a better man.

When the women left Egypt they came prepared, knowing that Hashem would make miracles for the Jews. Following the splitting of the Red Sea the men sang *Shirah*, praising Hashem for saving them. The women, led by Miriam, also sang. Understandably, the men knew that *yetzias Mitzrayim* was the precursor for the Giving of the Torah. Thus, they had much to sing about. What motivated the women's song? *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, explains that Miriam sang *Suss v'rochovo ramah bayam;* "The horse and rider were hurled into the sea" (*Shemos* 15:21). What did the horses do to deserve being drowned? The riders were Egyptian slave masters who participated in making life miserable for the Jews. They received their due. The horses were not simple bystanders – they assisted their masters. It was because of them that the Egyptians were able to move about freely in order to beat the Jewish slaves. Thus, the women who assisted their husbands by encouraging their faith in Hashem, had every right to sing *Shirah*.

David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:165), *Shalom rav l'ohavei sorasecha v'ein lamo michshol*, "Great peace have those who love You, and nothing causes them to stumble." *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, comments: There are *lomdei Torah*, those who study Torah; and *ohavei Torah*, those who love the Torah. *Lomdei Torah* is a reference to men who are enjoined to study Torah. Unfortunately, among them are those who waste their time and do not study Torah. They bring upon themselves a grave sin. *Ohavei Torah* refers to women who are devoted to *harbotzas Torah*, dissemination of Torah engendered by their husbands. They share in their husband's *avodas hakodesh*, holy service. Concerning them it says: "Nothing causes them to stumble." Women love the Torah and fulfill their obligation toward it. Since there is no imperative of *limud HaTorah* for them, no *michshol*, stumbling block, can be in their way.

ויקהל עליהם קרח את כל העדה

Korach gathered the entire assembly. (16:19)

Without a doubt, Korach was as powerful as he was charismatic. Nonetheless, he was going up against Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen, Klal Yisrael's* leaders, who certainly were greater than he. He succeeded in gathering a group of distinguished followers, heads of the *Sanhedrin*, men of erudition and discernment. He did not go to a bar and preach to ne'er-do-wells. He went to the elite of *Klal Yisrael* and succeeded in swaying them to support him. For this, they paid dearly. How did Korach pull this off? *Leitzanus*, cynicism, sarcasm, scorn, whatever name we call it; the result is the same: it degrades the subject and belittles the one who is the focus of their scorn.

Leitzanus achas docheh meah tochachos, one bit of sarcasm voiced by a cynic can undo (literally push away) one hundred rebukes. How? Imagine a prolific orator speaks passionately to a crowd. The people sit on the edge of their seats to listen to him, absorb and digest every word that he articulates. They are mesmerized, moved like never before. They are prepared to alter their life's trajectory, until one person, a *leitz*, cynic, makes a crack about the speaker. He does not malign him. He only belittles his stature, "Who is he to speak to us in such a manner?" He makes a joke about his appearance, the organization he represents, his *yeshivah*, etc. It is over! The entire speech had become meaningless. The cynic has just destroyed everyone's mood. Is it any wonder that *leitzanim* are not allowed to see the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence?

What sin did he commit? He was fully observant, righteous, honest, charitable, studied Torah. Yet, he is not granted entry into *Gan Eden*. Why? He belittled people, made them feel insignificant, and, in some instances, worthless.

Amalek did that to us. We left Egypt liberated, excited, infused with a new spirit, challenged with the opportunity to turn our backs on 210 years of slavery and looking forward to a bright future of serving Hashem in the Promised Land. Every nation of the world feared us. After all, we survived Pharaoh and watched as Hashem dealt with the Egyptians. We miraculously passed through the Red Sea and watched our enemies drown. We were one with Hashem. Suddenly, out of the blue, comes Amalek, bent on destroying us. While he could not triumph, he succeeded in dispelling our self-confidence. Everything that we believed in was placed on hold because Amalek put us in our place. Our visions, aspirations, and self-esteem were yanked from under us. Our passion, our very positive emotion, was soured by this nothing whose animus toward Hashem and His chosen people was the legacy he received from his ancestor, Eisav, which he bequeathed to his future biological and ideological offspring.

Rarely does the cynic's first salvo begin maliciously. It is usually offhand and thoughtless – but mean-spirited, as if he just does

not care who you are or what you represent. You mean nothing to him. The initial remark might be insignificant, but give it some time and it will domino into a violent firestorm that destroys everything in its wake. Cynicism invites others to join and incites comments and actions that go beyond the harmless and insignificant. A parent can make a remark at home about a *rebbe*/teacher, student, family, and within a few days, it has passed hands from their child to another, to another, back to their respective homes; and, before one realizes it, an innocuous remark has destroyed a person and a family.

Cynicism need be neither true nor accurate. A simple remark that has no basis, if it is "well-placed" and "well-timed," will mushroom and destroy. It is difficult to overcome. The *Mesillas Yesharim* compares the destructive force of cynicism/mockery to a leather shield smeared with oil that deflects and repels arrows from upon it – not allowing them to strike the body of the individual it is protecting. Likewise, with one cynical remark, a person repels from himself enormous amounts of inspiration, which would have otherwise influenced him.

In the opening *pasuk* of *Sefer Tehillim*, David *Hamelech* says: *Ashrei ha'Ish;* "Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked; or taken the path of the sinners, *u'v'moshav leitzim lo yash*av, or joined/sat in the session of scorners." The order of verbs seems to emphasize the increasing order of strength with regard to the deleterious behavior of these individuals. Thus, "Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked"; who has carefully avoided even a passing or temporary connection with people who wantonly and intentionally do evil. This person is on the lowest level (so to speak) of sinful behavior. He simply follows – does not stop to talk. The next level is he who takes the path/stands in the path of sinners. His contact is more lingering. He has a *shmuess*, conversation, with the sinner. Last, is what appears to be the most egregious of the three, he who sits with scorners. This implies that he has settled down for a considerable amount of time. He has an entire session with the scorners, whereby he chose to listen and impart his own "wisdom" to the conversation. This is a *moshav leitzim*.

Chazal (*Pirkei Avos* 3:3) describe this ignominious gathering as what we might construe to be a simple gathering of friends to *shmuess* about anything and everything, with no malice intended. Over time, however, remarks are made, statements spoken, and images conjured. In fact, it is even more innocuous that *Chazal* speak about two men that sit together and Torah is not spoken between them. These men have the time and opportunity to study or speak Torah, yet choose to ignore it. They are scorners, because they indicate by their behavior that the Torah means very little to them. They would rather talk about something foolish than share a Torah thought. This attitude disgraces and belittles the Torah and is a classic example of a *moshav leitzim*.

The idea goes one step further. It is not only about belittling the Torah. *V'ein beineihem divrei Torah*, "No words of Torah are spoken between them." Quite possibly, both men are engrossed in their studies – one is sitting on one side of the *bais hamedrash*, while the other one is sitting across the room. No Torah is passing between them. Neither one considers the other one worthy, or he is just not interested in sharing his thoughts with the other fellow. He probably does not consider him his equal in learning. He looks down on him. Such learning is the antithesis of what learning Torah is all about. *Derech eretz kadmah laTorah*, human decency, proper manners, respect precedes Torah study. One who studies Torah and does not become a *mentch* has not benefitted from his study.

Some people are compelled to navigate the sea of life in rough waters, and, as a result, are very much alone – not even in a crowd. Sadly, as if these sorry individuals are not sufficiently suffering, we – either by ignoring them, or by making crude, unconscionable remarks to them (for no reason other than self-assertiveness) – make their lives more miserable. When we measure the greatness of man, his scholarship and G-d-fearing observances aside, his attitude toward those who deal with challenges, who are less fortunate, whose portion in this world is not as full or nice as ours, who are alone, should be factored in. One person whose sensitivity toward the broken-hearted was in a league of his own was *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, Mashgiach Kaminetz Yerushalayim*.

His acts of kindness were more than mere acts; they defined his essence. He truly felt that he was no better than the next person. An elderly, childless man, alone in the world, did receive much kind treatment from many people. He once commented, "Everyone speaks kindly to me, because they pity me. Only one person enjoys speaking with me – *Rav* Moshe Aharon."

He addressed everyone with respect – adding the prefix "*reb*" to everyone's name. He would listen to their *chiddushim*, novallae, regardless of their quality. If it made a person feel good; if it elevated his self-esteem – he listened, questioned, added and repeated it to others. He felt a sense of humility before every man. He had a special "guest" every *Shabbos*. A dejected, unbalanced woman, who more than once would disrupt the meal, demanding that all the children leave the table. *Rav* Moshe Aharon could have overruled her, but, in her unhinged state, it might provoke her unnecessarily and engender a not so welcome reaction. He just moved his children to a different table.

One would think that when they moved to the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood, he would leave no forwarding address. *Rav* Moshe Aharon remembered on Friday night after *davening* that he had forgotten to give the new address to the woman. She would not know where to go for her meal. He immediately ran to her apartment and invited her to join them – which she did, for several years.

In summation, *leitzanus* is often silent, appears innocuous, but is actually far from benign. It is painful, insidious and has the power to destroy people's lives. What makes it so lethal is its benign nature. The word *leitz, lamed, tzadik*, backwards is *tzeil*, shadow. I think this is essentially what the *leitz* accomplishes. He undermines and compromises an issue, a statement, a rebuke – a person, by casting a shadow of ambiguity and aspersion. As I said, a silent saboteur.

אם כמות כל האדם ימתן אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם

If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them. (16:29)

This was not the first time that someone usurped the authority of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. His reaction this time was atypical. He asked Hashem that this group be meted with a punishment which was both unusual and stark. It was important for all the people to know that Moshe was Hashem's chosen leader and that he made every decision under His direction. The heresy expounded by Korach must be put to rest in a manner such that it would be recorded in the hearts and minds of *Klal Yisrael* that Moshe's prophecy may not be denied.

Chazal (*Nedarim* 39b) derive from here that *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, is alluded to in the Torah. "If these men die like all men, (whereby they become ill and are visited after the visit of all men) then Hashem has not sent me." Moshe indicated (according to *Chazal's* interpretation) that most people become ill, are visited during their illness prior to their succumbing to the illness. *Chazal* interpret the word *yipakeid*, is visited (upon them), that an ill person is visited during his illness. Apparently, the phrase *u'fekudas kol adam yipakekeid aleihem* is somehow related to visiting the ill. *Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita*, relates a story from which he gleans a deeper understanding of the relationship of *pekidah* (*yipakeid u'fekudas*) with visiting the ill.

Chacham Sulamon Mutzafi, zl, was one of the premier *kabbalists* in Yerushalayim during the early twentieth century. For the duration of an entire year, he would visit one of Yerushalayim's distinguished *rabbanim* who had become seriously ill and was confined to bed. Every Friday night, following *davening*, he would stop by the *Rav's* house to spend an hour discussing issues confronting the Jewish community and asking the *Rav* for his sage advice. All this was carried out prior to *Rav* Sulamon's going home. Considering the extra time it took to walk to the *Rav's* house and the duration of the time spent there, the Sulamon family (and his students) waited an hour and a half longer than other families. No one complained, but the students (who always valued the opportunity for learning) wanted to know why he spent so much time visiting the *Rav*.

The *Chacham* explained, "The *Rav* whom I visit every Friday night is a great scholar, who would ordinarily leave the *shul* on Friday night accompanied by a throng of followers, all thirsting for knowledge, who peppered him with questions on *halachah*, or to glean his sage advice. Now that he is ill and bedridden, in addition to the pain generated by his illness, he is also dispirited over being alone. Therefore, even though subjecting them to wait for me places a burden on my family, I am during this hour performing the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, in accordance with *halachah*."

This vignette underscores the meaning of visiting the sick. It is not about walking in, greeting, talking a few moments and leaving. The *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* is about filling the bedridden person's needs. We must ask ourselves: "What is he/she missing most? What does he/she need?" Visiting the ill should not be about assuaging the visitor's guilt feelings, but about filling the void in the life of the *choleh*.

This is why the Torah chose the word *pekidah*, which is synonymous with *chisaron*, deprivation, deficiency, something missing. *V'lo nifkad mimenu ish*; "And not a man of us is missing" (*Bamidbar* 31:49). We are enjoined to make the difference in the *choleh's* life by filling what is absent, lacking in his present condition.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, reverently known as the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, devoted his life to the pursuit of all things *chesed* – especially in the areas from which others shied away. In prisons, leper colonies, mental health wards, he focused on the forgotten and ignored. He sought to fill the void that most of these lonely people needed most: friendship. They knew that in him they had someone who truly cared. For example: (this could go on for many pages, but I only selected one instance): *Rav* Aryeh would visit the mental wards where individuals who had suffered serious emotional challenges were treated until they were able to return to society. (These were the lucky ones who knew they had a problem and were willing to do something about it.)

One day, he saw a poor soul who was covered with black and blue welts and bruises. Needless to say, *Rav* Aryeh became interested in this man's welfare. He asked what had happened to him. The other patients explained, "We are all ill, strung out beyond our emotions ability to cope. We are here for treatment. There are difficult moments when we lose it and become wild. The orderlies must restrain us forcibly, and, at times, it gets out of hand. They even have to subject us to corporal beatings in order to control us. We all have family and relatives with whom the orderlies do not want to hassle. Therefore, the beatings are not injurious. That man, however, has no family. So the orderlies expend all their frustration on him. Whenever they have a difficult day, they release their frustrations on him."

When *Rav* Aryeh heard this, he walked over to the orderlies and informed them that the man/patient was his relative. He would check on him and see to his continued welfare. From then on, he visited the man every *Rosh Chodesh* and always brought along a little gift. He realized what the man had been lacking: a relative. *Rav* Aryeh filled the void and became his relative.

Sponsored by Jeffrey and Jane Belkin in memory of their parents:
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שמעון בן גדליה ורייזל בת אליעזר Phillips
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland,
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Can there be Smoke Without a Fire?
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In parshas Korach, 250 men burnt ketores and paid with their lives.

Question #1: Frankfurters on the Blech

May I place cold frankfurters on top of a hot pot to warm them on Shabbos?"

Question #2: Cheese Dogs

"May one derive benefit from a cheese dog, which is a grilled hot dog with added cheese and chili sauce?"

Question #3: Lox for Eruv Tavshillin?

"I will be traveling overseas for Yom Tov and Shabbos, and it will be difficult for me to have cooked food ready for an eruv tavshillin. May I use lox as my eruv tavshillin?"

Foreword:

Our opening questions are germane to whether "smoking" qualifies as "cooking", for halachic purposes. As we will see shortly, the Gemara and halachic authorities discuss several situations affected by this question, with ramifications for the laws of Shabbos, kashrus and eruv tavshillin. Let us begin by understanding some background information.

In general, we are familiar with two very common methods of preparing food using heat. In one instance, the food is cooked directly by the heat, without any medium. This is what we do when we barbecue, broil, or bake. The food is cooked or baked directly by the heat. On the other hand, when we boil or fry food, we cook it in a hot liquid -- when boiling, usually in water, and when frying, in oil.

There are also many methods of making raw food edible without heat, such as salting, pickling or marinating. Preparing food this way causes the flavors of the different ingredients to blend together, which halacha calls beli'ah. Therefore, should one ingredient be non-kosher, the entire food will become non-kosher. However, there are halachic ramifications to the fact that these methods of food preparation are not considered "cooking." Even though salting and pickling food make it edible, the food is not considered cooked.Therefore, germane to the laws of Shabbos, one will not be able to heat up smoked food, using methods permitted to warm food on Shabbos. For example, although it is permitted to heat food that is already cooked by placing it atop a pot which is, itself, on top of a fire or blech, one may not heat up deli this way on Shabbos, when it has been pickled, but not cooked, which is usually the case.

Several types of smoking

In contemporary use, the term "smoked" may refer to several different ways of preparing food, with variant halachic ramifications. Here are three methods:

Hot smoke

Frankfurters and many other sausages are "cooked" in hot smoke, in an appliance sometimes called a smoker. Rather than being cooked directly by the fire, or by water that is heated by a fire, these foods are cooked by hot smoke. This is also the usual way in which raw salmon is made into lox. The question we will be discussing in our article is whether this is halachically equivalent to cooking in water, oil or other liquid. There are many halachic ramifications to the question. Unless specified otherwise, our article is discussing this type of smoking, in which smoke is doing the actual cooking (see Perisha, Yoreh Deah 87:9).

Cured food

In this type of "smoking," wood is burned inside a sealed room, usually called a "smokehouse." The food to be preserved and processed is placed inside the smokehouse for several days, or perhaps even weeks, while the smoke, now cool, cures and provides the food with a smoky flavor. Since the food production in this instance takes place in room temperature smoke, this process should not be considered either "cooking" or beli'ah. However, there is one late authority who considers this method of producing food to be similar to cooking (Chadrei Deah, quoted by Badei Hashulchan, Biurim 87:6 s.v. Ha'me'ushan). For the rest of this article, I will not take this opinion under consideration, since it is not within mainstream accepted halacha.

Regarding the laws of Shabbos, food smoked this way is certainly considered to be uncooked.

Smoke flavored

A third method of smoking is when food is prepared by steaming, cooking or broiling, and a natural or artificial ingredient called smoke flavor is added to provide smoke taste. If the food was prepared by being cooked or broiled, it is considered cooked for halachic purposes. If the food was prepared by being "steamed," a process similar to the first method of smoking mentioned above, the halachic issue is more complicated. The halachic question is whether cooking in steam and cooking in smoke are identical, or, perhaps, cooking in steam is like cooking in water. I will leave that aspect of this topic for a future article.

Smoking on Shabbos!

At this point, I will explain some of the halachic issues affected by the question as to whether smoking food is the same as cooking. One of the

39 melachos prohibited on Shabbos is mevasheil, cooking, or, in the words of the Mishnah (Shabbos 73a), ofeh, baking. This melacha involves preparing food with heat (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:1-5). One of the questions that the Gemara discusses is whether smoking food on Shabbos is considered a violation of the melacha of cooking on Shabbos min haTorah, and another issue is whether smoked food is considered cooked.

Here is one application of this issue: Once dry food has been completely cooked, such as baked or barbecued chicken or a kugel, there is no Torah violation in heating it on Shabbos. (There often may be rabbinic violations involved, but there are ways of warming cooked food on Shabbos that are permitted. We have discussed that topic in the past.) However, heating uncooked food on Shabbos usually involves a melacha min haTorah. The question we are raising is whether food that has been smoked, such as lox or hot dogs, is considered as cooked regarding the laws of warming food on Shabbos. If it is, then there are more options available to warm them on Shabbos.

Smoking meat and milk

A second area of halacha where this question – whether smoking constitutes cooking – is germane, is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat foods cooked together, basar becholov. Although we are prohibited from eating meat and milk together even when both are cold, or even from eating dairy after consuming meat, these prohibitions are only miderabbanan. The prohibition is violated min haTorah by cooking meat and dairy together or by eating meat and dairy that were previously cooked together. The question that we will tackle is whether smoking meat and dairy together is prohibited min haTorah or only miderabbanan.

There is a halachic difference that depends on whether preparing a meat and dairy mixture is prohibited miderabbanan or min haTorah. The prohibition against benefitting from meat and milk applies only when one violated the law min haTorah, but not when one violated it miderabbanan (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 87:3 and commentaries). Therefore, if meat and dairy were mixed together when cold, there is no prohibition in getting benefit from the resultant product, even though it may not be eaten. For this reason, selling pet food does not violate the law of benefiting from basar becholov, even when it contains both meat and dairy products, since the two are not cooked together, but blended together at room temperature.

The question germane to our discussion is whether a Jew may benefit from a meat and dairy product that was smoked together. For example, if someone smoked a raw frankfurter together with cheese, is it prohibited min haTorah, and for this reason one may not have benefit from it min haTorah, or not?

Bishul akum

Here is another kashrus application in which it will make a difference whether smoking is considered cooking or not. Chazal prohibited eating food cooked by a non-Jew, even when all the ingredients are kosher, unless the food is edible raw or would not be served on a royal table. Is smoking considered "cooking" germane to this prohibition, or not? This means that, if a non-Jew smoked food that is inedible raw, is it prohibited because of bishul akum? A practical difference is whether a hechsher on hot dogs must make sure that a Jew smoked the frankfurters; another is whether the smoking of lox must be done by a Jew. In both of these situations, the question is whether this food is considered cooked by a non-Jew, which might prohibit it as bishul akum, or whether it was prepared in a way that does not qualify as "cooking," and therefore bishul akum is not a concern.

Eruv tavshillin

Here is yet another halachic application in which it will make a difference whether smoked food is considered "cooked" or not. Chazal prohibited cooking on Yom Tov for Shabbos, unless one prepares an eruv tavshillin, a cooked item designated before Yom Tov that will remain until the Shabbos preparations are completed, and that thereby permits cooking for Shabbos on Yom Tov that falls on Friday. If smoked food is considered cooked, then it is acceptable to use a food that was prepared by smoking, such as a frankfurter or lox, as an eruv tavshillin. If smoked food is not considered cooked, then it is not.

The Yerushalmi

Now that we understand the background, we can examine the Talmudic discussion that concerns smoked food. We will begin by quoting a passage of Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedorim 6:1): "The rabbis of Kisrin asked: What is the law of smoked food in regard to the prohibition of bishul akum? In regard to cooking on Shabbos? What is its law regarding mixing meat and milk together?" The passage of Yerushalmi then changes the subject, without ruling on the three questions raised.

The issue the Yerushalmi seems to be asking is whether cooking food in smoke is halachically equivalent to cooking in liquid. In each of these instances, a hot medium is used to prepare the food. The first question of the Yerushalmi is whether food smoked by a non-Jew is prohibited, or whether the proscription of bishul akum is limited to food cooked via fire or liquid. If cooking in smoke is halachically considered the same as cooking in water or oil, then lox or frankfurters that were smoked by a non-Jew are prohibited because of bishul akum. On the other hand, if smoking is not treated as cooking, then there is no halachic problem with eating lox or hot dogs in which the actual smoking was performed by a non-Jew, provided that the ingredients are all kosher.

The second question of the Yerushalmi can be explained as follows: If a Jewish person placed raw frankfurters or salmon into a smoker on Shabbos, and the frankfurters or lox thereby became edible on Shabbos, did the person desecrate a melacha on Shabbos? If he did, then there are halachic ramifications germane to a product that was smoked on Shabbos in violation of the law.

The third question of the Yerushalmi concerns the laws of cooking meat and milk together. If smoking is considered cooking, min haTorah, then smoking a cheese dog violates basar becholov min haTorah, and it is prohibited to have any benefit from it.

As I noted above, the Yerushalmi that we quoted does not mention a conclusion regarding these three questions. Based on these unresolved questions, the Rambam (Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 9:6) appears to conclude the following: when our issue is a halacha that is min haTorah, we rule stringently. However, when the issue is a rabbinic question, we will rule leniently and not consider this to be cooking.

As a result, it is certainly prohibited as a safek de'oraysa to smoke a cheese dog or to smoke food on Shabbos. It would be prohibited to have any benefit from a smoked cheese dog. However, someone who violated these prohibitions would not be punishable for his offense, even when such punishment was practiced and even had he fulfilled all the requirements to receive this punishment, because the Yerushalmi did not conclude definitively that it constitutes a violation. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 87:6) follows the same approach as the Rambam.

We will continue this topic at some point in the future.

Conclusion

In non-observant circles, a well-known non-Jewish criticism of Judaism is frequently levelled: "Does G-d care more about what goes into our mouths than he does about what comes out?" The criticism is, of course, in error, and its answer is that Hashem cares both about what goes in and what comes out, and it is the height of conceit for us to decide which is "more" important in His eyes. Being careful about what we eat and about what we say are both important steps in growing in our development as human beings.

לע"נ

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

Minhagim: Divinity and Diversity

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Dr. Daniel Sperber's monumental studies on minhagim (Minhagei Yisrael: Mekorot veToledot), have received wide and justified acclaim. He has painstakingly analyzed the sources of many customs and traditions, and has traced their development over the centuries. He has demonstrated how and why customs arose as they did, for example, due to variant readings and interpretations of texts, specific religious outlooks, societal realities, and so forth.

One profound truth that underlies his research is that minhagim arose as an expression of piety. Jewish communities adopted various customs because they thought these practices enhanced their religious observance and brought them closer to the Divinity. Another profound truth underlying his research is that minhagim reflect a lively diversity within Jewish religious life. While minhagim are intended to relate all Jews to our One God, they do so through a variety of channels, allowing for significant diversity of practice.

Once minhagim have taken root, adherents have become emotionally attached to them and consider them as essential aspects of their religious devotion. They come to feel that minhag is on par with—or even more important than—halakha, and that minhag ties us not only to our God but also to our ancestors. "Minhag avoteinu be-yadeinu" is a phrase that evokes powerful feelings of loyalty to the traditions adopted by our forebears. Each of us observes Judaism through the prism of the halakhot and minhagim that we have inherited from our parents and grandparents, or that we have adopted by becoming part of a particular community.

Because our religious experience is so intertwined with our minhagim, we may find it jarring to come into contact with other—quite religious—Jews who observe minhagim different from ours. We don't feel entirely "at home" with them; we may think that their practices are quaint, or odd, or just plain wrong.

Rabbi Eliezer Papo, in his classic Pele Yoetz, describes the feelings of an Ashkenazic Jew who finds himself among Sephardim, or a Sephardic Jew who finds himself among Ashkenazim.

> *When the Torah speaks of compassion for strangers, it refers not only to proselytes, but also to any friendless person far from home whose spirits are low and whose heart is broken….This mitzvah applies to helping an Ashkenazi who finds himself among Sephardim, or a Sephardi among Ashkenazim.[1]*

While Rabbi Papo referred generally to the gulf between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, there are vast differences of custom within the Sephardic/Middle Eastern Jewish world, just as there are vast differences within the Ashkenazic/Eastern European world. While Jews of many languages and many lands worship the same God, they do so with diverse traditions, worldviews, and social contexts.

In the pre-modern world, Jews tended to have little interaction with coreligionists of different backgrounds and traditions. They came to think that their particular practices represented normative Judaism. If they found themselves among Jews with other cultural/religious characteristics, they may well have felt themselves to be "strangers."

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began a period of kibutz galuyot, when significant numbers of Jews of various backgrounds came together and had to deal with each other on an ongoing basis. The mass migration of Jews to the United States brought in hundreds of thousands of Yiddish-speaking Jews, and as many as 50,000 Jews whose native tongues were Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Arabic, or Judeo-Greek. The Jewish demography of the land of Israel was also to undergo dramatic change. The old Yishuv's historic Sephardic communities, as well as the traditional Ashkenazic communities, were engulfed by the influx of largely non-Orthodox Ashkenazic Zionists and Halutzim. During the 1930s and 1940s, refugees from Nazi Europe found their ways to Israel; in the early years of Israel's statehood, hundreds of thousands of Jews from Muslim lands in Asia and North Africa came to live in Israel. The diversity of Jewish Israelis was enhanced by the arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Western Europe, North and South America, South Africa, India, Australia, and so forth. In short, the intermingling of Jews of different cultural and religious traditions became a new reality. A question for the religiously-observant community was: How shall we respond to this incredible diversity?

Since the large majority of the world's Jews was Ashkenazic, primarily of Yiddish-speaking background, this group

naturally tended to see Judaism through its own eyes. Those of other backgrounds were either ignored or viewed as being quaint or exotic. The prevailing assumption among religiously observant Ashkenazim seems to have been that these "deviant" groups of Jews would/should assimilate into the normative Ashkenazic mainstream. Jewish cooking meant Ashkenazic cooking; Jewish names meant Ashkenazic names; Jewish language meant Yiddish; Jewish Torah learning meant Ashkenazic yeshivot; Jewish customs meant Ashkenazic customs.

Dr. Aviva Ben-Ur, in her study of the American Sephardic experience, describes a phenomenon which she calls "coethnic recognition failure," the denial of a fellow group member's common ethnicity.[2] Thus, while Ashkenazim and Sephardim are fellow Jews, coethnic recognition failure occurs when members of these groups do not recognize their shared ethnicity. Since the Ashkenazic establishment was largely in control of Jewish institutional life, non-Ashkenazim tended to be the victims of coethnic recognition failure. Dr. Ben-Ur writes:

> *Levantine Jews, with their unfamiliar physiognomy, Mediterranean tongues, and distinct religious and social customs baffled their Ashkenazic brethren. In the words of a contemporary satirist, "how could you be a Jew when you looked like an Italian, spoke Spanish, and never saw a matsah ball in your life?"…The denial of shared ethnicity and religion was the most painful and frustrating reaction that Eastern Sephardim encountered in their dealings with Ashkenazim….[3]*

The negative ramifications of coethnic recognition failure have been profound. The victims have had to struggle with deep issues of identity and self-confidence; their culture, traditions, and religious worldview have been marginalized. Many have felt the need to shed vestiges of their "oriental" identities in order to blend in with the majority group. In the process, the Jewish people as a whole has lost vital and vibrant elements of diversity.

The painful feelings of being ignored and rejected have been articulated in such books as The Other Jews: Sephardim Today by Daniel Elazar and We Look Like the Enemy: The Hidden Story of Israel's Jews from Arab Lands by Rachel Shabi.[4] But the issue goes beyond a negation of the value of non-Ashkenazic civilizations—these negative attitudes have led—and still lead—to overt discriminatory practices and policies.[5]

It is beyond the scope of this article to enter into a full discussion of the sociological, psychological, religious, and moral dimensions of coethnic recognition failure. Isaiah Berlin has noted that victims of "oppressed classes or nationalities" simply want to be recognized

> *as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own…and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free…. Paternalism is despotic…because it is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being, determined to make my own life in accordance with my own…purposes, and above, all, entitled to be recognized as such by others. For if I am not so recognized, then I may fail to recognize, I may doubt, my own claim to be a fully independent human being.[6]*

How is a non-Ashkenazic Jew supposed to maintain this essential feeling of being a "fully independent human being," when he/she functions in a Jewish world that ignores or belittles his/her culture, or treats him/her paternalistically? One response is a militant rejection of the dominant group. The opposite response is to adapt and to assimilate—to the extent possible—into the culture of the majority. Most non-Ashkenazim find themselves somewhere between these two poles.

Those who are part of the "majority culture" do not always understand how their attitudes and words impact on those of the "minority culture." Sometimes things that seem quite trivial can, in fact, have serious consequences.

In this article, I want to share my experience of four minhagim, and how coethnic recognition failure caused me much grief. This is not to be construed as a lament or complaint—but as a means of explaining to the "majority group" what we in the "minority group" have had to confront. The experiences I describe can be multiplied many times over by other non-Ashkenazim.[7] The hope is that through greater awareness and empathy, we will function as a stronger, happier, and more diverse Jewish community. We are not calling for paternalistic condescension or tolerance. What is needed is a genuine recognition that in our various searches for Divinity, different Jewish communities have followed diverse—perfectly halakhic and proper—roads.

I was born and raised in the Sephardic community of Seattle, Washington. My paternal grandparents came to Seattle from the Island of Rhodes early in the twentieth century. My maternal grandparents arrived at about the same time from towns

in Turkey. Both of my parents were born in Seattle. The language of the immigrant and first generation American-born Sephardim of Seattle was Judeo-Spanish. The customs and traditions were those that had prevailed in the old Ottoman Empire for centuries. The melodies and rituals of our synagogues were in keeping with those of the Jews of Turkey and Rhodes. I was blessed to be raised among pious, sturdy Jews, who had a profound sense of dignity and honor. For us, the Jewish way of life was not only normal and natural; it was happy, optimistic, and lively.

Seattle's Hebrew Day School, where I attended through eighth grade, may have had 25 to 30 percent of its students from Sephardic homes. No one would have known this from the manner in which Jewish studies were taught.[8] We learned that Jews eat latkes on Hanukkah—but we Sephardim didn't eat latkes, or even know what latkes were! We ate bourmuelos on Hanukkah! We learned that Jews pray with certain melodies—but in our synagogues, we had entirely different melodies. We learned that "our" grandparents in the shtetls maintained an intense Jewish life. But our grandparents never lived in those shtetls. We learned the musical notations for reading Torah and haftarah—even though these were not the melodies we chanted in our synagogues. In short, there was a profound dissonance between what we learned Judaism was—and what we Sephardim actually did. There was little or no attempt to acknowledge diverse customs and melodies, legitimate differences of opinion in halakha and minhag. The teachers taught "real, normative Judaism"—and we Sephardim simply weren't part of the story. Even Jewish history—to the extent that it was taught at all—had no references to Jewish life in Turkey or Rhodes, or North Africa, or the Middle East: Jewish history equaled Ashkenazic history, the experience of European—basically Eastern European—Jews. Discussions of the Shoah—as limited as they were—never mentioned the many thousands of Sephardic victims who perished alongside their Ashkenazic brothers and sisters.

Thankfully, I grew up in a family that had a strong Sephardic way of life, and this helped offset the things I was learning—and not learning—in school. But doubts lingered. Were we really Jews? Did our traditions have genuine value?

My first Shabbat at Yeshiva University in the autumn of 1963 was a moment of culture shock for me. That was the first time in my life I had ever seen chopped liver, or cholent, or kugel, or matsah ball soup. My classmates thought I was joking when I asked what these things were. Are you Jewish? they asked with feigned humor. I soon had to adjust to Ashkenazic "davening." Eventually, I even needed to learn enough Yiddish to follow the shiurim of my Yiddish-speaking Talmud teachers. I observed what my classmates did, and I wanted to fit in. Although everyone knew I was Sephardic—and very outspoken about this—they seemed to expect that I would somehow conform to the prevailing patterns and blend in. The unspoken assumption was that Yeshiva represents normative Judaism, and the rabbis there teach us normative Judaism; therefore, our search for Divinity must preclude genuine diversity. A quaint custom here and there is fine, as long as it does not threaten the rock-solid assumption that the "establishment" has the real Judaism and does things the really correct way.

Barukh Hu uVarukh Shemo

During my first year at Yeshiva, I learned that one is not allowed to respond "barukh hu uVarukh shemo" when wishing to fulfill one's obligation through the blessing of another person. Thus, for example, when family members hear Kiddush, they should only respond Amen. If they also say "barukh hu uVarukh shemo," this is considered to be a "hefsek," an interruption that invalidates their fulfillment of the mitzvah.

When I told my teacher that our custom was for family members to respond "barukh hu uvarukh shemo" when my father or grandfather recited Kiddush, he answered quickly and confidently: "Your family is doing it incorrectly. Your family members are not fulfilling the mitzvah."

Although this seems like such a minor issue, it had a powerful impact on me. My teacher was saying—without the slightest hesitation or doubt—that my family's traditions were not reliable, that I could not trust my father or grandfather any longer. If they were wrong on this practice, they might well be wrong on so many other things.[9]

When I returned to Seattle for Pessah in 1964, I told my father what I had learned, and asked that we change our incorrect practice. We should no longer be responding with "barukh hu uVarukh shemo." My father was astounded and pained by my request. He said: We have always had this practice. Even in Rhodes and Turkey, where they had great Hakhamim, they had this practice. It cannot be wrong. My response to my father was: You are paying a lot of money to send me to Yeshiva, and this is what I learned from my teachers there.

Our family stopped responding "barukh hu uVarukh shemo." Now, finally, we could fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush

properly, after so many years (generations!) of incorrect practice.

In 1992, a year after my father's death, I bought a set of books in a Jerusalem book store: Minhagei haHida. The book is a compilation of minhagim as found in the writings of Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (1724–1806), along with a commentary by Rabbi Reuven Amar.

In Siman 21:3 in the section dealing with customs relating to blessings, I read:

> *Minhag ha-olam la-anot "barukh hu uVarukh shemo" ke-she-shom'in azkarat Hashem, gam bivrakha she-yotse'im bah yedei hovatam, kegon Kiddush, havdalah, shofar umegillah, ukhyotsei bahem, ve-ein limhot bahem.*

The universal custom is to respond "Blessed be He and Blessed be His Name" when God's name is mentioned, also in a blessing where they fulfill their obligation [by listening and responding to someone else recite the blessing], such as Kiddush, havdalah, shofar, and Megilla, and other similar situations, and one should not prevent them from doing so.[10]

Although the widespread custom is to respond with barukh hu uVarukh shemo, the text goes on to say that it is nevertheless appropriate to refrain from saying this phrase when wishing to fulfill one's obligation through the blessing of another person.

Our family, then, had been following minhag ha-olam, the universal custom, and the Hida said ein limhot beyadam—people should be allowed to continue with this practice. Rabbi Amar's commentary on this passage cites a number of Sephardic sages who not only tolerated, but taught positively that one should respond with barukh hu uVarukh shemo. For example, in his commentary on the Haggadah, the great nineteenth-century sage of Izmir Rabbi Hayyim Palache specifically instructed the head of the household to remind his family and guests to respond barukh hu uVarukh shemo and Amen to each of the blessings he recited on their behalf. Rabbi Israel Abuhatseira, known popularly as Baba Sali, insisted that people respond barukh hu uVarukh shemo when he recited Kiddush. Rabbi Amar concludes that the custom to respond barukh hu uVarukh shemo was established by sages; it is a holy custom with strong foundations.

And this custom is widespread among all Sephardic communities east and west; as we have seen that it was customary in Italy, Greece, and Turkey, and all the countries of North Africa; and also in the Holy Land many have followed this practice.[11]

When my teacher at Yeshiva told me that my family's custom was incorrect, it was he who was wrong. He simply did not know that there were alternative traditions on this issue. Nor was he interested in looking into the matter. As far as he was concerned, he knew normative Jewish practice; anything that deviated from his knowledge was discarded. As a student, I deferred to my teacher's knowledge; I did not learn that his knowledge was deficient until many years later. Because of his teaching, he caused me to uproot a perfectly valid custom of our community, to upset my father and our family, and to cause me to doubt the validity of other of our customs and traditions.

There is, of course, a halakhic basis for considering barukh hu uVarukh shemo to be an interruption. According to this view, the listener must concentrate on the words of the person reciting the blessing so as to be able to fulfill the obligation by saying Amen. Any extraneous words can break the concentration, and can be construed as an interruption.

However, the widespread Sephardic custom also has a solid basis. After all, how can words blessing God and His name be construed as an interruption? On the contrary, saying barukh hu uVarukh shemo actually increases the attentiveness of listeners. Since these words are not extraneous but are germane to the blessing, they do not constitute an invalidating interruption.

It would have been so much better if my teacher had been knowledgeable about and sensitive to different minhagim. Instead of declaring our family's custom to be incorrect, he could have said: "There are differences in practice between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. I don't know the source of your custom, but I will try to learn more about it. Why don't you also try to find out more about your custom and why your family has this practice?" It would have been so nice if he had taught the class—Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike—the importance of appreciating variations in custom within the diverse communities of Jews.

Standing for the Ten Commandments

In our Sephardic congregations in Seattle, it was customary to remain seated during the Torah reading. This was true also when the Torah reading included the Ten Commandments.

When I attended Yeshiva, I soon noticed that some fellow students sat and others remained standing during the Torah reading. When it came to Parashat Yitro, though, all the students stood for the chanting of the Ten Commandments. I also stood, out of respect for the prevailing custom.

After services, I inquired of friends about the custom of standing for the Ten Commandments. They were incredulous that I had grown up in a synagogue where the congregation remained seated. Was I Orthodox?

I asked teachers, and was told that "the" custom is to stand for the Ten Commandments, as a re-enactment of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. When I was in my synagogue in Seattle during the summer, I stood up during the recitation of the Ten Commandments in Parashat Va-et-hanan. I felt odd being the only one to stand while the entire congregation was seated; but I had learned the truth in Yeshiva, and I had to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord. Following services, I discussed the custom with our rabbi—who was of Ashkenazic background—and he told me that it was indeed correct to stand for the Ten Commandments, but he did not want to create a stir by asking congregants to change their accustomed practice. This served to underscore how wrong our traditions really were.

Years later, I learned that the custom to remain seated during the reading of the Torah has a venerable history, and that the Ari haKadosh remained seated during the Torah reading. I also learned that the custom to remain seated during the Ten Commandments was a longstanding and valid tradition.[12] It was based on the notion that all the Torah—from beginning to end—is holy. To stand only for the Ten Commandments would give fuel to the belief of the minim that only the Ten Commandments were given by God. We remain seated to demonstrate the equal holiness of every word of Torah. (The sages did not require us to stand for all Torah readings, since this would be a terrible imposition on the public; and since the Ari himself did not stand.)

When I was working on my doctoral dissertation at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, I researched the history of the Jews of the Island of Rhodes. I came across a responsum of the eighteenth-century Rabbi Eliyahu Israel, who was born and raised in Rhodes and went on to become rabbi in Alexandria, Egypt.[13]

The question was: May a person be stringent with himself and stand for the Ten Commandments in a congregation where the custom was to remain seated? Rabbi Israel responded:

> *It is obvious that one is not permitted to do so because it appears presumptuous [mehzei ke-yuhara]….Moreover someone who does so [stands] in the presence of Talmidei Hakhamim greater than he, is deserving of excommunication [nidui].*

If a self-righteous person stands while others are seated, this gives the impression that only he is truly scrupulous about honoring the Torah, while the rest of the congregation are not properly honoring the Torah.

I had now come full circle. First I learned that our custom was wrong. Then I willfully violated my synagogue custom so that I would be in conformity with the "correct" custom that I had learned in Yeshiva. Then I learned that our custom had a proper basis after all. Then I learned from the responsum of Rabbi Eliyahu Israel that I was guilty of nidui for having stood up for the Ten Commandments in our synagogue where the custom was to be seated! Each step in this process caused much stress and inner turmoil. If only I had learned from the outset that Sephardim and Ashkenazim had different customs in this matter, and that both customs are worthy and respectable.

Wearing Tzitzith Outside One's Pants

When I attended Yeshiva, some students wore their tzitzith hanging outside their pants, while many others did not. With the passage of time, though, an increasing number of students—especially the more devout ones—put their tzitzith outside their pants.

In one of our study sessions, we read the Shulhan Arukh (O.H. 8:11) who ruled that the mitzvah of the Tallit Katan entails wearing the tzitzith "on one's clothes" so that one will always see them and remember God's commandments. We then read the Mishnah Berurah on this passage (no. 26):

> Those men who place their tzitzith within their pants, not only are they hiding their eyes from what is written [in the Torah], “and you shall see them and remember etc.,” but moreover they are disgracing [mevazin] a commandment of God; in the future they will have to stand in judgment for this.

Thus, not only may one wear the tzitzith on the outside; one must do so, or face the consequences in the next world for having abused one of God’s mitzvoth. It could not be clearer.

The only problem was that I wore my tzitzith inside my pants. I had never seen anyone in my community—even the most pious—who wore their tzitzith outside the pants. So I assumed that we were wrong yet again. We just were not as religiously correct as the Ashkenazim.

After reading the Mishnah Berurah, how could I possibly keep my tzitzith inside my pants? So I pulled them out.

As long as I was in Yeshiva, this was fine. But when I returned home with my tzitzith out, family members and friends were surprised—even upset. Was I becoming a fanatic? I read them the Shulhan Arukh and the Mishnah Berurah, much to their consternation. One of my uncles, who was born and raised in Turkey, replied: This isn’t how we do it. We wear tzitzith in our pants, never on the outside. I smugly showed him the texts, and let him know that we had always been doing it incorrectly.

What I experienced was similar to what thousands of Sephardic yeshiva boys have experienced when attending Ashkenazic yeshivot. The mainstream is Ashkenazic. The laws and customs are Ashkenazic. If one has different customs and traditions, they simply do not count. The teachers seldom if ever acknowledge diverse customs (except perhaps within the Ashkenazic world itself). The students listen to their teachers. The environment fosters uniformity.

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, dealt with the issue of how to wear one’s tzitzith. He indicated that although the Shulhan Arukh called for wearing the tzitzith so that they can be seen, the Ari haKadosh held otherwise, teaching that according to the kabbala, tzitzith must not be worn outside one’s pants. Virtually all Sephardic posekim have followed the opinion of the Ari, not that of the Shulhan Arukh. Rabbi Halevy notes:

> In truth, we have never seen even one of the Sephardic hakhamim and rabbis who has removed the tzitzith outside the pants; certainly they took into consideration the opinion of the kabbalists, and the ruling of the Hida whose rulings we have accepted.[14]

Rabbi Halevy indicated, though, that if a Sephardic student felt a great need to wear his tzitzith outside his pants, he was allowed to do so.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef also explained the sources for the Sephardic custom to wear the tzitzith of the Tallit Katan inside one’s garments. He took issue with the Mishnah Berurah, noting that those who wear their tzitzith inside do so on principle (based on kabbala), not from fear of ridicule from non-Jews. He concluded that it is right and proper for Sephardic students in Ashkenazic yeshivot to wear their tzitzith inside.[15] They should not change their custom.[16]

When I was in Yeshiva, I had worn the tzitzith outside for a year or so; then, somehow I decided to return to my original practice of wearing them inside. I had not known at that time of the rulings of Rabbis Halevy and Yosef, but was happy later to read their writings confirming my intuitive decision. I tucked in my tzitzith because I came to feel that it was pretentious [yuhara] to wear them hanging outside my pants.

Family Names

To Ashkenazic ears, Sephardic names often do not sound “Jewish.” My grandfather, Marco Romey, used to tell us how he and fellow Sephardic immigrants were not recognized as Jews by Ashkenazim in Seattle. After all, how could names like Alhadeff, Policar, De Leon, or Calvo be Jewish?

Yet, names are vital components in a person’s identity. I found it (and still find it) annoying when fellow Jews display perplexity about the Jewishness of my name, Angel. Actually, Angel is a good Jewish name going back to medieval Spain. Many illustrious Jewish Angels lived in Salonika, Rhodes, Alexandria, Sofia, Damascus, and throughout

the Ottoman Empire. Yet, as a student in Yeshiva, my Yiddish-speaking Rebbes invariably called me “Engel”—even after I corrected them many times. To them, Engel was “Jewish;” Angel was not. I’ve grown accustomed to the question: What was your real name before it was changed to Angel? The questioners do not even imagine that Angel was the original, Jewish name.[17]

Anyone familiar with Sephardic civilization knows how important family names are to Sephardim. They are badges of pride and honor. Most Sephardic communities have the custom of calling a man for an aliya to the Torah by his full name, including his family name. A Ladino proverb has it that basta mi nombre ke es Abravanel; my name is enough, it is Abravanel, i.e., if I have a distinguished family name, this gives me a sense of importance and self-worth.

About 40 years ago, a classmate at Yeshiva asked me to be a witness on the ketubah for his wedding. The Mesader Kiddushin was his Rosh Yeshiva, an elderly sage who had been born and raised in Eastern Europe. A large crowd, including many of our mutual friends, gathered in the room for the signing of the ketubah. The Rosh Yeshiva asked me to sign on a blank piece of paper before signing the ketubah. I complied and wrote my name on the paper: Mordecai ben Hayyim Angel. The Rosh Yeshiva asked me: “What is that last word in your signature?” I answered, “That is my family name, Angel.” The Rosh Yeshiva answered with perfect coethnic recognition failure: “Jews do not have last names.” I replied: “I am a Sephardic Jew, and Sephardim do have last names. We sign with our last names.” The Rosh Yeshiva stared at me and repeated: “Jews do not have last names.” He motioned me to the side, declaring me to be an invalid witness. In the presence of numerous guests, including so many of my friends and classmates, the Rosh Yeshiva had found me unfit to sign a ketubah. I wasn’t Jewish, since Jews don’t have last names! I was so shocked and humiliated by this horrifying rejection, that I felt I was going to faint. My friend, the bridegroom, tried to console me. But there was no consolation. I was publicly repudiated by a venerated Rosh Yeshiva. My name and reputation as an upstanding Jew were negated in the presence of numerous guests. Even after 40 years, I still feel the burning shame and anger I felt on that occasion.

The next day, I went to top officials of Yeshiva to complain about the injustice perpetrated against me by that Rosh Yeshiva. All gave me the same basic answer: “He is an elderly Rebbe; he meant no harm; let it go.” Not one of the officials of the Yeshiva suggested that the Rebbe ought to be rebuked for his behavior, or that he even owed me an apology. (He never did apologize.)

There is a long tradition of Sephardic and Italian Jews signing ketubot using their family names, going back into the medieval period.[18] Great rabbis approved of this practice, and indeed followed this practice. Yet, the Rosh Yeshiva—unaware of a legitimate Jewishness outside his own framework—declared that “Jews do not have last names.”

I discussed this experience with Professor Daniel Sperber, in a telephone conversation on March 15, 2010. Dr. Sperber indicated that it is now fairly common practice in Israel for Ashkenazim as well as Sephardim to sign ketubot using their family names. This is not merely a matter of family pride, but is a more accurate way of identifying the signatory. The Rosh Yeshiva who long ago had humiliated me, would be surprised to learn that Jews—including Ashkenazic Jews—do indeed have last names.

Conclusion

It is not realistic to expect members of any group of Jews to be fully familiar with customs and traditions of all other groups of Jews. But it is imperative for members of all groups of Jews to recognize that other Jews also have proper customs and traditions. Instead of ignoring or sneering at or disqualifying traditions unfamiliar to us, we need the humility and intellectual openness to be sensitive to the legitimate diversity within halakhic Judaism.

A broader and deeper understanding of halakha and minhagim should increase our appreciation of the magnificent corpus of Jewish religious traditions; should diminish the evil of coethnic recognition failure; should give rightful status to the Jewish “minorities;” should enhance the Jewishness of the Jewish “majority.”

In our universal quest to serve the Divinity, we must appreciate the unique value and power of our Jewish diversity.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Eliezer Papo, Pele Yoetz haShalem, Jerusalem, Tushia Press, 5747, pp. 99–100 (Ger).

[2] Aviva Ben-Ur, Sephardic Jews in America, New York and London, New York University Press, 2009, p. 108.

[3] Ibid., pp. 108–109. See also my book, La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982, pp. 41ff.

[4] Daniel Elazar, The Other Jews: Sephardim Today, New York, Basic Books, 1989; Rachel Shabi, We Look Like the Enemy: The Hidden Story of Israel's Jews from Arab Lands, New York, Walker and Company, 2009; Rachel Shabi, Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

[5] See, for example, Yifat Bitton's article, "Old-Fashioned Discrimination, New-Style Battle," Conversations, no. 1, spring 2008, pp. 39–45, where she discusses the discriminatory policies of some Bais Yaacov schools in Israel, and the existence of quotas for non-Ashkenazim in elite Ashkenazic-dominated schools.

[6] Isaiah Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind, New York, Farrar. Strauss and Giroux, 1997, p. 228.

[7] The examples I offer from my personal experience date back to the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved much since then—and in some ways has actually worsened. My son, Hayyim, who attended Yeshiva College in the early 1990s wrote an article for the school newspaper, The Commentator, which he entitled "Jews and Sephardim." He lamented that the pervasive attitude among faculty and students was that Ashkenazic Judaism was real Judaism; any reference to Sephardic history and tradition (after the Middle Ages) was either paternalistic or dismissive. The general "religious culture" among American Orthodox Jews today has become increasingly Ashkenazic, largely under the influence of ArtScroll which pointedly uses only Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew. Agencies that used to supervise kashruth, now tend to supervise kashrus; the Rabbinical Council of America established a "geirus commission;" people whose names used to be David, Yonatan and Sarah, are now often known as Dovid, Yonoson and Soroh. When we buy kasher food products, we find labels indicating that the items are pas yisroel or made with kemach yoshon. In the various yeshivos gedolos, the black hat garb is universal, including the wearing of the tsitsith outside one's pants. The growing hareidization of Orthodoxy has led to a growing homogenization of Orthodoxy, generally in an Ashkenazic pattern. Since many of the limudei kodesh teachers, even in the Modern Orthodox school system, received their training in Hareidi schools, the tendency toward uniformity is exacerbated, with little or no interest in giving serious time or energy to exploring non-Ashkenazic traditions. For a discussion of the impacts of hareidization on American Orthodoxy, see Samuel Heilman, Sliding to the Right, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2006. The situation I describe in the United States also manifests itself in Israel. The Heshvan 5771 (October 2010) issue of "De'ot," the journal of Neemanei Torah vaAvodah, is dedicated to Religious Zionism's blatant and consistent marginalization of Sephardic/Middle Eastern Jews. In order for Sephardim to flourish within organized Religious Zionsism, they have had to camouflage their "Sephardicness" so as to blend into the prevailing Ashkenazic patterns. Although Sephardic/Middle Eastern Jews are increasingly asserting their rights and their identities, the situation is still very far from satisfactory.

[8] The situation in elementary Day Schools in the United States has improved somewhat, especially in schools with significant numbers of Sephardic students. Yet, based on personal experience and conversations with faculty and parents from throughout the United States, I believe the problems described in this article continue to be pervasive.

[9] This problem, of course, goes beyond the issue of Sephardic identity and tradition. Many Ashkenazic students also have found themselves in situations where their "Rebbes" have invalidated family traditions. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodox Society," Tradition 28:4 (summer 1994). Although beyond the purview of my present article, it is important to consider the impact of the current system of Torah education on female students—when very little (if any) attention is given to women's Torah achievements, outside of midrashically-framed tales of female biblical characters.

[10] Reuven Amar, Minhagei haHida, Jerusalem, Makhon Mishnat Hakhamim, 5750, vol. 1, p. 143.

[11] Ibid., p. 148.

[12] Ibid., p. 100. See also Shemtob Gaguine, Keter Shem Tob, vol. 1, London, 1934, p. 314.

[13] Eliyahu Israel, Kol Eliyahu, Livorno, 5552, no. 5.

[14] Haim David Halevy, Asei Lekha Rav, Tel Aviv, 5738, vol. 2, Orah Hayyim, no. 20. See also 3:2; 5:4; 8:5.

[15] Ovadia Yosef, Yehaveh Daat, Jerusalem, 5738, vol. 2, no. 1.

[16] Yitzhak Yosef, Yalkut Yosef, Jerusalem, 5745, vol. 1, pp. 21–22.

[17] The situation has improved in recent years due to the popularity of Angel's Bakery in Israel. Jews of all backgrounds are getting used to considering Angel as a Jewish name.

[18] See for example, Moses Gaster, The Ketubah, New York, Hermon Press, 1923; Jose Luis Lacave, Medieval Ketubot from Sefarad, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 2002; Jeffrey S. Malka, Sephardic Genealogy, Bergenfield, Avotaynu Press, 2009.

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PARSHAT KORACH

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIGHTING FOR A COMMON CAUSE

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

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

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

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

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

> "Come morning, and God will make known who is His and who is holy... and he whom He has chosen...
> This you shall do, take fire-pans, Korach and his entire group, ... and put on them KTORET before God [i.e. at the Mishkan]... and he [who's offering] God shall choose will be established as "kadosh"... (see 16:5-7)

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

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

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

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

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

In other words, the purpose of the "ktoret" test is to determine the validity of Korach's claim that everyone in Am Yisrael is "kadosh" (see 16:3), and hence everyone should be allowed to offer 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 'ktotet 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 Reuven. Most probably, this site served as 'party headquarters' for this group of people who have openly rebelled against Moshe's political leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO GROUPS - TWO PUNISHMENTS

At this point, God must prove to the political dissidents that Moshe's leadership was by divine appointment. Therefore, God Himself must 'create' a "beriya" - a new form of creation - to punish this group. Those who distance themselves from this group are saved (see 16:27-34). However, note that the ground miraculously devours only the members of Group Two - i.e. Datan & Aviram and their staunchest followers.

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

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

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

GROUP ONE –
the 250 men at the Ohel Moed - CONSUMED by fire.
GROUP TWO –
Datan & Aviram & Co. - SWALLOWED by the ground.

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

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

KORACH - THE POLITICIAN

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

	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 Reuven
Punishment:	consumed by fire		swallowed by the ground

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

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

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

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

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

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

KORACH - WHERE ARE YOU?

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

Furthermore, although Korach himself is never mentioned in the punishment of Group Two (scan 16:23-34 carefully to verify this), many of his followers, described by Chumash as "ha'adam asher l'Korach", are swallowed up by the ground (see 16:32) together with 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 bodied 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'lo l'shem sha'mayim" (an argument not for the sake of Heaven).

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

Pirkei Avot may be teaching us the very same message that the Torah may allude to through its complex presentation of these events. Precisely because Korach and his followers claim to be fighting "l'shem shamayim," Chazal must inform us of Korach's true intentions. Korach may claim to be fighting a battle "l'shem shamayim," but his claim is far from the truth. His primary interest is to promote himself, to build a power base from which he himself can emerge as the new leader.

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In 16:1-2, everyone is introduced: Korach, 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?]

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).

Revelavation, 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 Tzitizit -> 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.

Parshat Korach

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

ARASHAT KORAH:

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'uvein. In addition, there are 250 of the nation's leaders, whose lineage remains unspecified.

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOT SO FAST:

But then comes an event which questions whether this rebellion splits into two issues as neatly as we have set out. Moshe, infuriated by Datan and Aviram, asks Hashem not to accept their "offering." This makes it sound like they are actually part of the Korah/Levi group, and will be participating in the fire-pan challenge, while according to the picture we have been developing, it would make no sense for anyone but Korah and company (who are challenging the proesthood) to take the fire pan test. What do Datan and Aviram, who are attacking Moshe's leadeship, 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 leshon ha-ra, immediately orders Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam to the Ohel Mo'ed, where He appears in a pillar of cloud and furiously rebukes Miryam and Aharon for what they have said about Moshe. Many commentators struggle to explain why Moshe must be present to witness the dressing-down that Miryam and Aharon receive. Why must Moshe witness as Hashem blasts of his sister and strikes her with a plague?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hashem is truly addressing Moshe himself:

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

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

ENTER KORAH:

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A "Shayne Gelechte"

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

One of the few maxims in my sparse Yiddish lexicon is "*a shayne gelechte*." Literally translated, it means ""A fine laugh," but idiomatically we would translate it something like, "If it didn't make you cry, you'd have to laugh."

The Israeli political scene is a *shayne gelechte*. I've never been political, and my indifference — and sometimes hostility — to politics and politicians has been borne by a political system where we are either about to have the fifth election in two years or a coalition government so broadly-based that if you were to stand at the left-hand side of it, you'd need a telescope to see the right. And in between there's a vast floppy underbelly waiting to crash down on a hapless electorate.

By rights, this Holy Land should be ruled by those who are the least selfish, the least power-hungry, the most noble and the most honest.

We love democracy, but, presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I'm not sure how many of us would submit to extensive invasive surgery based on a straw-poll taken on Twitter or Facebook. The idea that if you ask enough people a question, you're bound to come up with the right answer, is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach that "The wisdom of the Torah is the opposite of the man in the street."

Our esteemed Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Nota Schiller, *shlita*, once observed: "The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy of opinion." Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for your opinion to be significant, it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the most expert.

And who are the most expert? To me, there is no perceptible difference between Mount Everest and K2, but K2 knows that Everest is taller than it. And thus it is with our *Gedolei HaDor*. When it comes to the great ones of the generation, each one knows who is more outstanding and in which areas he excels.

I suppose you could translate the phrase *shayne gelechte* with the English word "farce" — and that about sums up the state of the Israeli political system.

In 1887, Hon. John Dalberg-Acton wrote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by

authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it."

Our great Torah Sages sanctify the positions they hold, and not the reverse.

Possibly one of the most egregious power-grabs in history is revealed in this week's Torah portion. Korach, posing as a champion of the masses with consummate political skill, engineers a rebellion purely for his own ends, and manages to convince, among others, two hundred and fifty of the most august and important leaders of the people.

Joseph Goebbels (*y"sh*) said, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus, by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State."

If that isn't a *shayne gelechte*, I don't know what is.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague that besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people. He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops.

Then, G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. The specific duties of the *levi'im* and *kohanim* are stated. The *kohanim* were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Torah portion are the laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn and various laws of offerings.

Q & A

Questions – Korach

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit?*
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol?*
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's *Parsha?*
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16-6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (*16:3*)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (*16:17*)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Revolting Revolutions

Rashi's opening comment to the Torah portion of Korach (Num. 16:1) refers the reader to *Midrash Tanchuma*, which characterizes Korach's perfidious actions as both a *pasha* and *meridah*. In this context, these two words mean "rebellion," as Korach sought to *rebel* against Moses' leadership and assert his own authority. In the end, Korach and his followers suffered an ignoble death, and the rebellion was swiftly quashed. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 49a) derives the rule that a *mored b'malchut* ("he who rebels against the kingship") deserves death from a prophecy said to Joshua: "Any man who contravenes (*yamreh*) your [Joshua's] mouth, and he does not listen to your words for anything that you will command him, he will be put to death..." (Joshua 1:18). For those keeping score at home, we've encountered three different Hebrew words for the verb of "rebelling": *poshea, mored,* and *mamre*. In this essay we will shed light on these ostensible synonyms by delving into their core roots and trying to understand how they differ from one another.

The word *pasha* most famously appears in Scripture in the sense of "rebelling" when the Moabite king Mesha, who had hitherto been a vassal to the King of Israel, rebelled (*vayifsha*) against Jewish hegemony and asserted his own independence (II Kings 3:4-5). That war saw the kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom unite against the Moabites in a story told both in the Bible and the Mesha Stele. *Midrash Tanchuma* expounds on the verse "a brother rebelled (*nifsha*)..." (Prov. 18:19) as similarly referring to Korach *rebelling* against his "brother" (i.e., cousin) Moses. The Talmud (*Yoma* 36b) explains that *pasha* denotes a "sin of rebellion," as opposed to *chet* and *avon* which refer to less overtly-rebellious sins. This understanding matches the Biblical usage of the term *pasha* as an expression of "rebelling."

That said, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) asserts that the primary meaning of *pasha* is not "rebellion." Instead, he argues that the word *pasha* primarily refers to negligence that comes about through laziness. The literal *poshea* does not try to rebel or anger the one against whom he sins. Rather, the *poshea* is one whose indolence shows that he does not care about the repercussions of his actions. Indeed, elsewhere the term *poshea* refers to a watchman who did not live up to the vigilance expected of him (see Exodus 22:8 and *Bava Kama* 21b, 29a). He did not purposely try to undermine anybody's property rights. He simply did not care enough to be careful in stopping certain damages from happening.

When it comes to approaching the honor of a king — and especially to the King of Kings — a higher degree of mindfulness is expected. Laziness and apathy are tantamount to rebellion simply because by not making sure to live up to one's expectations, one actually slights the king's honor. It is in this sense that *pasha* was borrowed to mean "rebellion." In fact, in many cases, including the story of Mesha, Targum translates *pasha* as *mored* (see Targum to II Kings 8:22, Isa. 1:2, Jer. 33:8), which implies active defiance rather than just passive languor. [Targum also uses the Aramaicized form of the Hebrew m*eridah* to render instances of the Hebrew *meridah* in Aramaic (see Gen. 14:4, II Kings 18:20, Isa. 36:5, Yechezkel 2:3).]

Ibn Janach and Radak trace the Hebrew word *meridah* to the triliteral root MEM-REISH-DALET, which they explain bears two different meanings: "rebellion" and "lowly/downtrodden." For example, when Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Chron. 36:13) and when the five kings rebelled against the four kings

(Gen. 14:4), the Bible uses verb cognates of *meridah* to denote "rebellion." But the Bible also uses the phrase *aniim merudim* (Isa. 58:7) to denote especially "downtrodden" paupers.

The two lexicographers in question do not offer a way of uniting these disparate meanings of the root MEM-REISH-DALET, but Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 14:4) finds a way to do so. He explains that *aniim merudim* are considered so unfortunate and lowly that there is no friction or reprisal against those who abuse them. The way he puts it, there is no pushback ("rebellion") against such abuses because the victim is anyways marginalized and considered too unimportant for mishandling him to elicit any response. Sadly enough, Zion was said to have reached such a sorry state of existence in the aftermath of the destruction of the First Temple (Lam. 1:7).

In his *Machberet Menachem*, Menachem Ibn Saruk has a different way of looking at things. Like Ibn Janach and Radak, Menachem classifies cognates of *meridah* as derivatives of the triliteral root MEM-REISH-DALET. However, unlike them, he classifies cognates of *merudim* as derivatives of the biliteral root REISH-DALET ("downward motion" / "descent"), in the sense that an especially oppressed and demoralized poor person has fallen so far down from the lofty place of a respected human being.

As is his way, Rabbi Pappenheim even traces the word *meridah* to the biliteral REISH-DALET, noting that the MEM is not essential to the root of the word. He explains that the verb *rodeh* (Gen. 1:28, Lev. 25:43) refers to "lording over others" in the Machiavellian way that rulers keep their subordinates/subjects "down," such that they cannot assert their own independence. With this in mind, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that many three-letter roots that begin with the letter MEM actually derive from two-letter roots, with the letter MEM serving as a means of switching the meaning of the two-letter root to its exact opposite. In this case, he explains that the MEM that comes before the letters REISH-DALET in *meridah* yields the opposite of "lording over others" — i.e., "rebellion," by which those others assert their control.

Our third synonym for "rebellion" is *mamre*. Moses calls the Jews *mamrim* in terms of their rebellious nature in refusing to heed G-d's word (Deut. 9:7, 9:24, 31:27), and a renegade elder who refuses to heed the rulings of the Sanhedrin is termed by the Mishna a *zaken mamre* (*Sanhedrin* 11:2). In a similar manner, the Talmudic term for an apostate who "rebels" against G-d is *mumar* (*Shabbat* 69a, 87a, *Eruvin* 69a-b, *Yevamot* 47b, and more places). Finally, a rebellious child is called a *ben sorer u'moreh* (Deut. 21:18), wherein the word *moreh* is a cognate of the term *mamre*. In the case of the rebellious child, the Midrash (*Sifrei* to *Ki Teizei* 218) offers an exegesis tying the word *moreh* in the sense of "rebelling" to the word *moreh* in the sense of "teaching," explaining that the rebellious child has "taught" himself a different path. But this exegesis does not tell us the etymological basis for the term *mamre*.

For that, we turn again to the early Hebrew lexicographers. Ibn Janach and Radak trace the various inflections of *meri/mamre* to the triliteral roots MEM-REISH-HEY and MEM-REISH-REISH, both of which can refer to "rebelling" or "changing [from what one was commanded to do]." Menachem, as we might expect, links all of these words to the biliteral MEM-REISH.

Rabbi Pappenheim goes into more detail about the root MEM-REISH, defined as "changing," "switching," or "getting rid of one thing so that something else can take its place." He offers a list of Hebrew words related to this idea that are derived from this root, including: *mohar* ("bride price"), given in *exchange* for a woman's maidenhood; *maher* ("quickly", "fast"), constantly-*changing* movement; *mar* ("bitter"), a taste rejected by one's taste buds who seek to *replace* it with something more palatable; *morah* ("razor"), the tool used for shaving one's hair that paves the path for new hair to *replace* that which was cut; *temurah* ("switching"), the illegal act of trying to transfer holiness from one sacrificial animal to another; and *amirah* ("saying"), speech used for the *exchange* of ideas, especially as proper etiquette demands that the parties involved in a conversation "alternate" taking turns in speaking.

When it comes to *meri/mamre*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that just as foodstuff described as *mar* can be said to be "revolting" to the palate, so do the words *meri/mamre* denote a reaction to something unpalatable. Anytime a person repudiates something that does not agree with his senses/sensibilities (not just his sense of taste), said person engages in an act of *meri/mamre*. He "rebels" against that thing and disagrees with it. This concept can be applied to political leadership as well, such that when one "rebels" against the established rulers, one "switches out" their word for somebody else's word and "replaces" the established leader by deposing him and installing somebody else.

Interestingly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) blurs the distinction between *meri/mamre* and *meridah/mored*. He proposes that both of those expressions are rooted in the two-letter MEM-REISH, whose core meaning is reflected in the honorific *Mar* ("Mister") — an expression of "dignity" and "sovereignty." The way Rabbi Marcus seems to understand it, when one "rebels" against authority, one is poised to assert one's own self-possession and dignity, reestablishing himself as an autonomous being. (Rabbi Pappenheim's list of MEM-REISH derivatives cannot include *meridah/mored*, because his classification system only recognizes monoliteral/biliteral roots with the additional third letter from the group of letters HEY, ALEPH, MEM, NUN, TAV, YOD, or VAV. In this case, the third letter would be DALET, which does not fit Rabbi Pappenheim's system.)

In summary: *Pesha/poshea* means "rebelling" only in a borrowed sense, while its core meaning refers to *negligence* and *laziness*. *Meridah/mored* focuses on "rebelling" as a *counter-response* to a certain situation, especially as a means of rejecting the present rulership. *Meri/Mamre* focuses on "rebelling" as an act of *switching* allegiances from one party to another.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 9)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

"These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one's parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all." *(Tractate Shabbat 127a)*

The eighth mitzvah on the list is praying with concentration. Rashi, explaining how this mitzvah fits into the context of the other *chessed*-orientated mitzvahs listed here, writes that many of the prayers we recite daily are not only for the benefit of the individual who recites them. Rather, they benefit the entire Jewish People. For this reason, the central prayer of the prayer services — the *Shemoneh Esrei* – is said in the plural and not in the singular as might be expected. We are not just praying for ourselves. However, prayer is not a completely altruistic experience. Our Sages teach (Bava Kama 92a) that when a person sincerely prays for mercy for his friend, *and he needs exactly the same thing*, his prayer for himself will be answered first. Our Sages are teaching us something absolutely fundamental: a vital component of standing in front of G-d and successfully beseeching Him to help us is heartfelt empathy for the difficulties of others. Profound prayers require concentration and intent so that they may reach their mark.

Praying with intent is so essential that Rabbi Yehuda ben Shmuel of Regensberg (1150-1217), known as Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChasid, writes in his formative work *Sefer Chasidim* that one should only pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* in a language other than Hebrew if doing so will allow the person to pray with greater concentration and intent. But if that is not the case, it is preferable to recite the prayers in their original Hebrew, even if they are not properly understood by the person.

We are being taught that in order for our spiritual lives to have true significance, they must be imbued with meaning and focus. We must *think* — both *before* we act and *as* we act — and not merely do things by rote. Rote is the bane of spiritual growth, and ultimately leads a person to feel disconnected from G-d and dissatisfied with their spiritual self. So insidious is rote that it can lead a person to make the most ridiculous mistakes.

Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, the twentieth century spiritual leader of the Klausenburg Chassidut, was revered by all for his saintliness andoverwhelming love for each and every Jew. He once related that the very first question he received upon becoming the rabbi of a community was from one of his congregants, who approached him while wearing his arm *tefillin* and holding his head *tefillin* in his hand. He told the Rebbe that he had no idea if he was putting *on* his *tefillin* for the beginning of the morning prayers or if he was *taking them off after* having finished the prayer service! What was he to do? The Rebbe answered that he should put on the head *tefillin* and pray the morning service. Why? Because even if he had in fact already prayed that morning, it was crystal clear that he had not done so with any concentration whatsoever.

In the blessing before the recitation of the Shema in the morning, we entreat G-d to, "...instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate...and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teachings with love." In

a very sharply worded critique, the Chofetz Chaim explains that very often our prayers are answered and G-d grants us the ability to "understand and elucidate." But, due to our obliviousness, we don't even realize that. We aimlessly continue living our lives with the same uniform regularity — not even stopping for a moment to realize that the priceless gift we requested has been bestowed upon us. However, when we pray with concentration and intent, we are emphasizing to ourselves that every day is a new entity, replete with countless new opportunities to help us reach a heightened awareness of who we are. And to help draw us closer to G-d.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Korach: Yoma 51-57

The Pillow-Pillar of Creation

"Why was this stone called 'even shetia?' Because it was from this stone that the world was founded during Creation." ("Shetia" is Hebrew for "foundation".)

This teaching on our *daf* refers back to the term "*even shetia*" that was mentioned in the *mishna* on the previous *daf*. Prior to the destruction of the First Beit Hamikdash, as part of the Yom Kippur service the *Kohen Gadol* would place special incense on the *Aron HaBrit* — the Holy Ark of the Covenant — in the Holy of Holies. However, the *Aron HaBrit* was not present in the Second Beit Hamikdash. The *mishna* teaches that in the absence of the *Aron HaBrit*, the incense was instead placed on the *even shetia*, which, as our *gemara* explains, was the stone from which the world was founded during Creation. In English, this stone is therefore familiarly referred to as "the foundation stone."

The basis for this concept of a foundation stone for Creation is a section in Tehillim. (50:1-2) "Hashem spoke and called to the earth, from the rising of the sun until its setting. From Tzion, the finery of beauty, Hashem appeared." Chazal teach that we see here that Hashem called to the earth to initiate Creation. And that Tzion — "the perfection of beauty" — was the place of the foundation of Creation.

A fascinating observation about this foundation stone is made by one of the great Torah commentaries, Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels (1555-1631) — often referred to as "the Maharsha." Granted, this source in Tehillim is cited in our *sugya* to show that Tzion was the foundation-place of Creation. However, he notes, we do not find anywhere in the Tanach, the *mishna* or the *gemara* any specific mention of the place of foundation being a *stone*! What, therefore, is the source that Creation began with a stone?

The Maharsha answers this question by citing a *midrash* that speaks about a very special stone that Yaakov Avinu used in the service of Hashem.

When Yitzchak Avinu grew advanced in age and failing in health, he endowed his son Yaakov with an especially beautiful and prophetic blessing: "Nations will serve you and kingdoms will bow down to you. You will be a master over your

brothers, and your mother's sons will bow down to you. Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed." (Ber. 27:29) And when his mother feared that Yaakov's brother that Esav would kill Yaakov for receiving the blessing that Esav felt should have rightfully been his, she sent Yaakov away to the home of her brother Lavan in Charan until Esav's wrath subsided.

Rivka passionately told Yitzchak that she wanted their son Yaakov not to find a wife locally since the neighboring people were totally inappropriate for Yaakov. Rather, he needs to travel elsewhere in order to find a wife who would be a "kosher soulmate" for him. As a result, Yitzchak called Yaakov and said to him, "You will not take a wife of the (local) daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Betuel, your mother's father, and find a wife there from the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother. And may the Almighty G-d bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and you will become an assembly of peoples. And may He give you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land of your travels, which Hashem gave to Avraham." (Ber. 28:1-4)

After receiving his father's blessings, Yaakov began his travel. But before he departed the Land of Israel, he stopped along the way at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years. The commentators explain that this "interlude" was meant not only to increase his Torah knowledge in general, but, in particular, to prepare him for the unique challenges he was likely to face as a result of being in the Diaspora and no longer in the holy Land of Israel.

After these fourteen years in yeshiva, Yaakov Avinu continued his travel to find a wife. Just before he left the Land of Israel, he stopped for a night in a place called Luz, took stones from there, placed the stones under his head and slept. Our Sages teach that "only in that place did he lie down (albeit with the ground for a bed and rocks for a pillow), but during the fourteen years he learned Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he did not lie down for even one night because he was engaged in Torah study." (Ber. Rabbah 68:11)

When he woke up the next morning, he saw that Hashem had miraculously caused the stones to become united into *one single stone*. Yaakov Avinu took this special stone and declared, "Indeed,

Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it… How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of Hashem, and this is the gate of Heaven." (Ber. 28:16:17) Rashi explains that at that particular time, Hashem miraculously moved Mount Moriah, the future site of the Beit Hamikdash, to the same place where Luz was located.

Yaakov Avinu proceeded to take this stone, set it up as a pillar and then used it in his tendering a libation offering to Hashem. He prophetically announced, "And this *stone* will be a House for Hashem." (Ber. 28:22)

The *midrash* concludes that this same stone was none other than the stone where the world began. And the location of this foundation stone would so fittingly be the site of the Beit Hamikdash, the ultimate place to fulfill the purpose of Creation of drawing close to Hashem.

- *Yoma 54b*

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach
by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

*Another article in the series on the Lauffer renovations and the people behind them.

Seva Dorn (25)
Born: Minsk, Belarus
Raised in Cleveland, Ohio
Cleveland State University — Business Administration
Mechina Program of Ohr Somayach: 2019 to date

Most people have heard of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg and a cohort of other young entrepreneurs who either began their businesses as teenagers in a garage or who dropped out of college to build a disruptive business empire. Had Seva Dorn not found his way to Ohr Somayach, you probably would have seen his name in a list of the youthful business greats. But, Seva wasn't only Jewish, he felt Jewish — and as his success in business grew and he thought about his future, he realized that he cared more about his *neshama* than about his wallet.

Seva's parents grew up in Minsk and Pinsk in the former Soviet Union and while their families were proud of their Jewish heritage, observance of traditions and mitzvahs was minimal. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the opportunity to rediscover their Jewish roots presented itself. Seva's father taught himself Hebrew and found employment in a synagogue in Minsk as a Hebrew teacher and tutor. Seva's mother heard of an opportunity to study in the Gateshead Seminary in England and sent for an application.

Fortunately for the both of them, the application had portions that were in Hebrew, and Seva's mother could not read Hebrew. She heard about Mr. Dorn who was a Hebrew teacher at the Minsk synagogue and asked him for help in filling out the application. She was accepted and spent a valuable year at Gateshead Seminary. During that year, a correspondence between the two developed. When she returned to Minsk, they married.

At that time, in the early 1990's, many Jews left Russia. Seva's father's family moved to Ashkelon and his mother's to Cleveland. In 2000, Seva's parents followed his mother's family to Cleveland. Seva was five years old and spoke no English. The first school he attended was a Jewish one, but as he struggled with the language and the culture of his new home, his unhappiness affected his attitude towards that school, and his parents transferred him to public school.

The family was involved with the Chabad community in their Cleveland suburb, and when Seva got to middle school he was an active member of NCSY. After high school he came to Israel on a Birthright trip. Although he had been to Israel many times before to visit family, this trip was an eye-opener. He returned to Cleveland with a serious commitment to Judaism. Seva started college, joined a Jewish fraternity and became active in Chabad on campus.

In 2015, after his first year of college and upon the advice of his NCSY rabbi, he applied to the two-month summer JInternship Program at Ohr Somayach. He loved it.

In the meantime, SevSolutions, LLC, a Digital Marketing business that he started in high school was taking off. There weren't enough hours in the day to both remain in school and to run the company. And since his major was Business Administration, he was convinced that actual experience in running a business was more valuable than learning how to do it.

The business grew by leaps and bounds (it now has offices in the US, England and India) and Seva was fully invested in its success. But his mother was concerned about his spiritual life. Without disclosing her motives, she planned a trip for the two of them to London and Paris, where they would visit museums and other cultural sites and have a great European vacation. Seva was delighted. What she did not tell him until later was that they were going to spend a Shabbos in Gateshead with one of her former school friends.

That Shabbos changed Seva's life. He met Yosef Tzvi Schleider. Yosef Tzvi is a very successful businessman in his middle thirties with a large family, and to whom the Torah and his family were much more important than making money. Comparing himself to Yosef Tzvi, Seva felt that despite his own success in business, he had actually accomplished very little. He also realized that he was not growing spiritually. He had to find his purpose in life. Seva's wise mother had accomplished her goal.

He came back to Ohr Somayach's Mechina Program and stayed until Pesach of 2020. After going home for the holiday, he was stuck. Because of the Covid pandemic, Israel had closed its border even to returning students.

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Seva started learning daily with Rabbi Zalman Corlin, the head of the JLE program in the States, and with Rabbi Yaakov Lubow of our staff in Jerusalem, and also going to the *shiurim* of Rabbi Yisroel Brog's *Tiferes Avigdor Miller Yeshiva* on the campus of Telshe Yeshiva in Wickliffe, Ohio. He also started a new business — acrylic sneeze guards — the folding plastic partitions that are so ubiquitous in the time of Corona. He marketed them to schools.

His first major contract was with the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland and a consortium of other Jewish schools in the area. Through the recommendation of an Ohr Somayach alumnus, Toby Kaye, who is also Seva's US accountant, he met a young, Orthodox businessman who got him an appointment with a group of the top administrators of the consortium. He made his pitch and landed the contract. That got his newest business off the ground, and orders started pouring in from all over the country. In gratitude for his help in procuring the contract, Seva offered his new acquaintance a generous commission for his help. But Cleveland being Cleveland, his offer was declined and instead it was suggested that he give that same amount to *tzadaka*. Seva had never written such a large check to any charity. He had always plowed his profits back into his businesses. But this time he had no choice. He gave a large check to one of the local charity funds. With that act of *tzadaka,* he felt a *bracha* enveloping him, and that *Shamayim* was indicating to him that to be truly happy and successful in business, one had to give *maaser*.

As soon as the opportunity to return to Israel presented itself, Rabbi Brog advised Seva to return to Ohr Somayach. Seva realized that if he was ever going to feel fulfilled in life and prepared for marriage, he must learn Torah now — business could wait.

He returned to the Yeshiva on November 20, 2020. Being a returning student to the Mechina Program, he chose as his roommate, Moshe Males, whose father came from Cleveland. It was a good choice.

A few months later, as the two roommates were admiring the new Beis Midrash that had just been built on the Yeshiva campus, Seva suggested that they repaint their own Beis Midrash in the Lauffer building. Seva would provide the money and Moshe the labor.

As they were surveying the project, Nissim, another student in Mechina, suggested moving one of the bookcases to a different wall. When they did, they saw the mold and cracking behind the bookcase and realized that a paint job wasn't enough. Seva asked Moshe what a complete renovation of the space would entail. Moshe answered that the ceiling tiles and ceiling lighting, bathrooms, furnishings, steps, front door and walls at the entrance of Lauffer all needed replacing or repair. Seva told Moshe to order the material and then set about raising the money. Much of it came from Seva's own pocket, but other *talmidim* chipped in, some in quite a significant way. One student with a car drove across Israel to get just the right marble for the steps! Others helped to *schlep* the heavy materials so that Moshe could do the work. As you can see from the pictures and video, the project is nearing completion. And what a job they did! *Kol hakavod* to the *talmidim* of the Mechina program. Their extraordinary devotion and sacrifice to the yeshiva will go down in the annals of Ohr Somayach history for generations to come.

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Sleep On It

It seems that there is a Biblical source for "sleeping on it" — the decisions that need some thoughtful reflection and time and could benefit from the passage of night before they are made.

Korach and his cohorts — Datan, Aviram, and On ben Pelet — stirred an uprising accusing Moshe and Aharon of misappropriating the leadership for themselves, when, in reality, the entire community is holy. Two hundred and fifty men joined the rebellion. Moshe heard their message and fell upon his face. His words to them: *Let morning come, and then G-d will make known who is His and who is the holy one... Whoever He will choose, He will allow him to come near to Him [serve as High Priest]* (Bamidbar 16:5) The test that Moshe devised would mean that each of the men risked their lives, knowing that if they participate, and are not selected as priests, they would die.

G-d did not need the night to think it over, and neither did Moshe. But Moshe wanted Korach and his followers to sleep on it. Well, not exactly to sleep — but to use the nighttime to reflect before taking action. Since the dispute would be decided by the destruction of the rebels, they were to be given time to come to their senses, particularly in the quiet and seclusion of the night, when everyone returns to the company of their own family and is free to commune with himself. There, at night, in his home, he is removed from the influence of inciting companions. Day is a time for activity, but night is a time for study and reflection. This is symbolized by the fact that the oil of the *ner tamid* — representing wisdom and Torah — was to remain lit from "evening until morning," during the time most suited for contemplation.

Moshe also wanted to utilize this time to remonstrate with those who had gone astray, and he spends the rest of the day attempting to persuade them. He approached Korach, and separately approached Datan and Aviram. Moshe understood that Korach had two motives. One, he was standing up for the rights of his tribe of Levi, which he felt were violated by the preference given to Aharon. Second, he sought the honor of the priesthood for himself, a motive that he disguised as an argument for equal rights for all. Datan and Aviram, on the other hand, primarily opposed Moshe's political leadership. Thus, Moshe's messages of persuasion were tailored to each. The hope was that, upon reflection, the men would come to their senses.

There was a fourth rabble-rouser listed in the verse, who we never hear about again — On ben Pelet. According to the Sages, when he was removed from the influence of the others, in the privacy of his own tent, his wife persuaded him to give up the rebellion. Similarly, the children of Korach, at the moment of decision, righted themselves and were spared the fate decreed upon their father.

Even in the description of Creation, the morning comes after the night — *And it was evening, and it was morning,* is the refrain after each day of Creation. The word for morning, *boker*, is related to the word meaning to distinguish (*l'vaker*), for it is the time where the outlines of things emerge and it is possible to distinguish one thing from the other. Perhaps this applies not only in the physical dimension, but also in the realm of thought — things can become clear only after a nighttime reflection, removed from the influences of the day. The contemplation that night affords can often clarify complexities and allow our minds and hearts to tease apart the logical from the illogical and the good motives from the bad motives — emerging with clearly defined convictions and conclusions in the *boker*.

- *Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 18:5, Shemot 27:20-21, Ber. 1:5*

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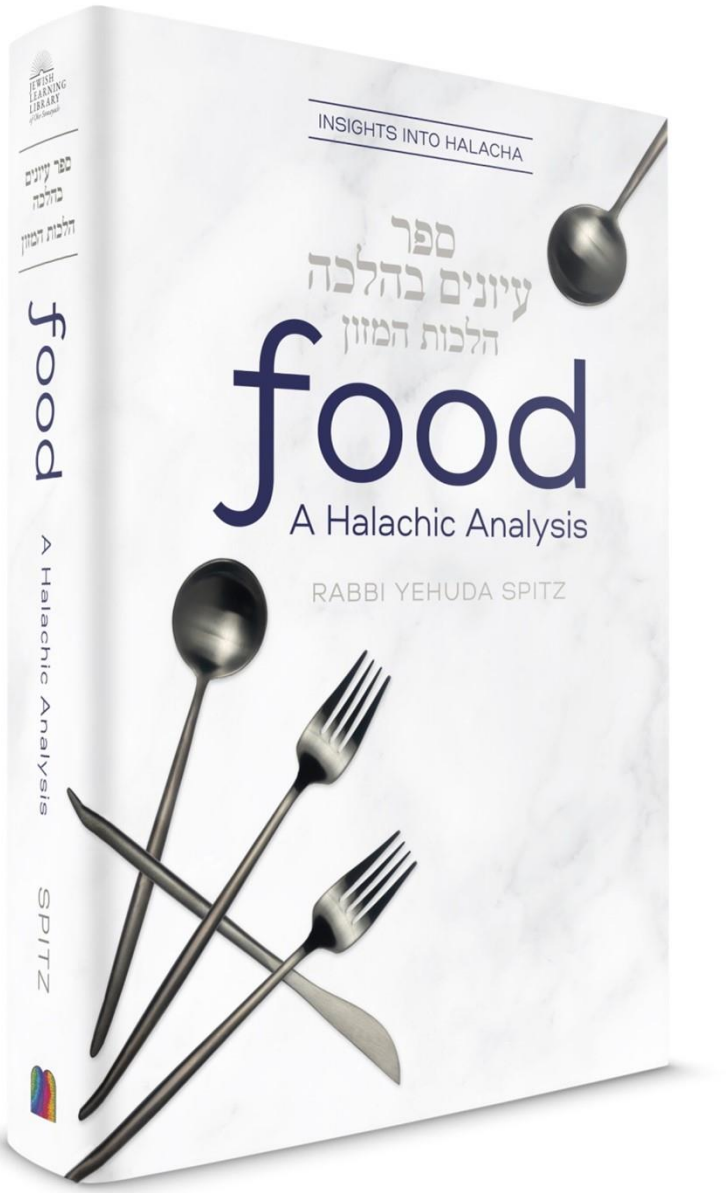

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