BS"D
June 27, 2025.

**Potomac Torah Study Center**
Vol. 12 #36, June 27-28, 2025;2 Tammuz 5785; Korach 5785
Rosh Hodesh Tammuz is Thursday and Friday, 30 Sivan - 1 Tammuz

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

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

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. May we verify that the 12 Day War did knock out Iran's nuclear capability, and may Hashem continue to protect Israel and all our people from our enemies and their weapons.**

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**Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l, whose fifth yahrzeit is 4 Tammuz. Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohan-Sedgh, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her.**

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Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, uses evidence from the Torah to prove that the final events involving the generation of the Exodus all take place during a single week. Miriam's tzaraat (chapter 12), the departure of the Meraglim (chapter 13), and Korach's rebellion (chapter 16) all take place between 22 and 29 Sivan in the second year after the Exodus. (See *Torah Anthology* 13.333-34.) Since this Shabbat is 2 Tammuz, last week was the anniversary of these distressing events.

Korach's rebellion is the final episode in the Torah discussing the generation of the Exodus. The Torah opens next week with chapter 19, the law of becoming tahor after contact with a dead body (originally presented to Moshe while B'Nai Yisrael are still next to Har Sinai but only recorded in the Torah here, after the final discussion of the generation doomed to die off without entering the land). After a gap of 38 years, the Torah continues in chapter 20 with events of the final year in the Midbar.

The Torah presents the relationship between Moshe and Korach (Shemot 6:16-26). Levi's second son, Amram, has three sons: Gershon, Kohat, and Merari. Kohat, the second son, has four sons; Amram is the oldest, and Izhar is second oldest. Amram has two sons, Aharon and Moshe. Korach is the oldest son of Izhar, the second oldest son of Kohat. Since Aharon's and Korach's fathers are brothers, Moshe and Korach are first cousins. Moshe is the second son of the oldest brother, and Korach is the oldest son of Amram's next oldest brother. Since Moshe is the second oldest son of Levi's second oldest son, there is family history among the Levi's descendants of second oldest sons having religious

priority over first born sons (as there had been in numerous generations in Sefer Bereishis). In terms of precedent of which relative will become the religious leader of a given generation, Korach could expect his claim to equal that of Moshe, all else equal.

Originally, the concept in the Torah was for a first born son to be the religious leader of a given generation. After the sin of the Golden Cow (Egel Zahav), where all tribes except Levi participate, God removes the religious leadership of each family from the first born son to descendants of Levi. This change takes place in Behaalotecha. God gives the religious leadership to direct descendants of Aharon (the Kohanim), and descendants of Levi have the other religious obligations, including carrying the Mishkan and holy objects used inside the Ark. Korach objects to Aharon and his sons, not he, being the Kohanim.

The presentation of the disputes in the parsha can be difficult to follow, because Korach brings members of Reuven (Yaakov's first born son) and numerous other first born sons from other tribes, all of whom lose their religious leadership roles after Egel Zahav. This large group joins Korach and his sons to challenge Aharon and Moshe for both religious and political leadership. (At the last minute, Korach's sons decide to go with Moshe, rather than their father, and they do not die in the challenge.) Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's Devar Torah, included as an attachment to the email version, sorts out the various groups and makes the separate stories easy to follow.

The Torah opens the parsha by stating that Korach takes, without indicating what he takes. Rabbi Marc Angel considers explanations among early commentators, rejects them all, and concludes that Korach takes nothing, only himself. Korach is all bluster with no evidence, no arguments, nothing to explain why he, not Aharon, deserves to be Kohen Gadol. Rabbi Haim Ovadia contrasts the Korach in the Torah with Korach in Midrash. The Midrash presents articulate and convincing reasons why Korach's case for replacing Aharon as Kohen Gadol has merit. During the time of writing the Midrash, many kohanim's extreme presentations of halacha would conclude that poor homeowners owed substantial payoffs to the kohanim. A later reform required that any payment that a person had to turn over to the kohanim would go to some other Kohen, not the Kohen making the ruling.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that Korach would attack the person, not the message. Korach thus attacks Moshe personally but offers no evidence why Korach, rather than Moshe or Aharon, should be the leaders of B'Nai Yisrael. As Rabbi Sacks observes, we see this evil today, especially in universities and in the cancel culture of political extremists. Writing in 2020, Rabbi Sacks condemned the practice of not letting opponents speak – at universities, demonstrations, and in political contexts. Rabbi Sacks' insights predicted the woke and anti-Semitic demonstrations and violence that reached across universities, high schools, and into synagogues – in many countries – in recent years. One reaction to this extremist behavior could have been the unexpectedly strong showing of the Republican party in the 2024 U.S. elections. Hopefully the successful campaign against Iran's nuclear weapons – with virtually no support for Iran even from enemies of Israel and the United States – is one indication that the followers of Moshe are replacing many of the followers of Korach at long last.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya,**

**David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

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## Parshat Korach: The Anatomy of Leadership – Then and Now

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers. ***

*This week's OTS for You has been dedicated in honor of Dr. Avi Tuchman on his 90th birthday*

As Israel stands on the frontlines of the intense and ongoing conflict with Iran and its proxies — and as the United States has become directly involved — the question of authentic leadership is not theoretical; it is urgent and real. While a fragile ceasefire has been announced, at this writing its durability remains uncertain and our security, our moral strength, and our national unity all depend on the individuals who guide us in these fateful times. In this context, the lessons of Parshat Korach provide a timeless — and timely — look at the nature of true leadership.

In Parshat Korach, we encounter one of the most dramatic challenges to leadership in the Torah. Korach, joined by Datan, Aviram, and 250 others, confronts Moshe and Aharon with a bold accusation: *"You have gone too far! For all the community are holy… why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord's congregation?" )*Bamidbar 16:3(.

At first glance, Korach's argument seems compelling, even democratic. Why should Moshe and Aharon alone wield spiritual authority? But the Torah is clear that this rebellion is not rooted in a genuine concern for the people's welfare. Rather, as Rashi )Bamidbar 16:1( underscores, Korach is driven by jealousy, ambition and a hunger for power. His rebellion is thinly cloaked in ideology, but fundamentally self-serving.

Interestingly, the Haftarah for Parshat Korach )I Shmuel 11:14–12:22( also involves a transition in leadership — from the prophet Shmuel to Shaul, Israel's first king. But here, the tone is entirely different. Shmuel gathers the people and recounts his leadership, asking: *"Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken?"* )I Shmuel 12:3(. Like Moshe in our parsha — who protests, *"I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I wronged any one of them"* )Bamidbar 16:15( — Shmuel stands with a clean record. But the outcomes diverge significantly.

Korach's rebellion ends in dramatic divine punishment. The earth opens and swallows him and his followers — a clear statement that his challenge was illegitimate. But in the Haftarah, God instructs Shmuel to accede to the people's request for a king. Shaul is appointed — not because he campaigned or vied for power — but because the people felt a deep need for a new model of leadership, and he humbly answered that call.

Korach's movement is fragmented. Even his own children, as Chazal teach )Sanhedrin 110a(, distanced themselves from his cause. Shaul's appointment, by contrast, emerges from the will of the nation, unified in their desire for a king.

This juxtaposition reveals a critical insight into leadership through the prism of Torah values. Leadership in Judaism is not about self-advancement — it is about service. It is not imposed from above but emerges from within the people. True

leadership, in contrast to Korach's self-aggrandizing push to place himself and his tribe into a position of power, requires humility, integrity, and responsiveness to the real needs of the community.

This contrast – between ambition and service, self-promotion and humility – is not merely a biblical tension, it is playing out before our eyes today. As Israel faces threats to its very existence, the stakes of leadership are existential. We pray that our military, political and communal leaders make decisions not for personal gain or political survival, but from a place of responsibility, sacrifice and devotion to Klal Yisrael. Our security depends on this. Our unity depends on this. Our future depends on this.

And this is the kind of leadership we so desperately need today – not only from our elected officials or generals, but from every one of us — whether soldiers in uniform, rabbis in our synagogues, teachers in our schools, or parents at home. Each of us can choose to serve, to lead, to care for others. In these times, when fear and uncertainty might tempt us toward cynicism or self-preservation, we must resist the Korach within us and instead remain rooted in the values of Torah and morality.

As we read Parshat Korach and its Haftarah, our soldiers are defending Israel's borders – by land, by sea and by air – not only here in Israel, but also in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and now, in operations directed at the heart of Iran's nuclear threat. The entire nation is carrying the burden of this historic and uncertain time. We are reminded that legitimacy in leadership does not come from charisma, credentials, or clever arguments; rather, it stems from trust, humility, and the willingness to place others' needs above one's own. This is the leadership we seek in times of war and peace alike.

With the future of Israel and the stability of the region at stake, may we be blessed with leaders – military, political and spiritual – who, like Moshe and Shmuel, embody integrity and service. And may each of us strive to meet this moment with courage, faith and unity.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

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## Dvar Torah: Korach: All We Can Take From a Taker (2004)

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And Korach took…* )Bamidbar 16:1(

*He took: He seduced the heads of the Sanhedrin with soft speech.* )Rashi(

*He took …a bad business for himself.* )Tactate *Sanhedrin* 109B(

*He took: He assumed the right to himself.* )Rabbi S.R. Hirsch(

What exactly did Korach take? The verse is purposefully ambiguous about what it was that Korach took, perhaps to imply all of the above and more. The Chovos HaLevavos offers a "must read" prescription on how to be a good neighbor or friend that may help us to understand where Korach went awry and why.

> *"If one who trusts in G-d has a wife and relatives, friends and enemies, he should trust that G-d will save him from being overly burdened by them and he should endeavor to meet his duties toward them to fulfill their wishes and to be sincerely concerned for them. He should avoid*

*causing them any harm and promote their interests. He should be their steadfast supporter in all their concerns and advise them what is advantageous to them in religious and secular matters.*

*He should do this to serve G-d as it written, "Love your neighbor as yourself," "Do not hate your brother in your heart." Not because he hopes to be repaid by them, not to make them indebted to him, not because he loves to be honored and praised by them, not to have authority over them, but rather to fulfill the commandment of the Creator and to keep His covenant and His ordinances in their regard.*

*For if his motive in fulfilling their wishes is one of those ulterior motives mentioned above, he will not obtain what he wants from them in this world, he will labor in vain, and he will lose his reward in the World-to-Come. If, however, he acts solely out of service to G-d, then G-d will help them )his beneficiaries( to repay him in this world and will put his praises in their mouths and will increase his stature in their eyes."*

The Chovos HaLevavos gives a clear *"if/then"* promise without any qualifications. If one engages personal interactions with a selfish motive then the mission will certainly fail. However, if one acts out of a sense of dutiful concern then success is guaranteed.

We can all testify with our own experience to our reaction when confronting a sales person in a store. *"Can I help you?"* We remain suspicious as to whom they hope to help. The agenda runs interference with our ability to trust. The child who is asked to recite *"Mah Nishtana"* to impress the guests will also more likely freeze and fail recognizing subconsciously he is being asked to risk humiliation to offer someone else a feeling of success or nachas.

If a parent or teacher can convince a child that they have his or her best interest at heart then they can really begin to work wonders. The relationship becomes inspired with genuine respect. The person's needs are perceived as an end and not just a means.

Nobody wants to be a mere instrument for somebody else's aggrandizement, a stepping stool or even a medal on their chest. Even if a person is pleasant and charming the weight of the agenda eventually crushes the relationship. I always imagine being hugged by one of those teddy bears on the front of a truck. Watch out!

Why is it that when we go to a doctor and if we don't like what we hear we go for second opinion and yet when we get on a plane we trust the first pilot offered? The difference is that the pilot is also getting on the plane. Korach tragically crashed a plane with 250 families and their possessions by convincing them and himself he had their best interest at heart when it was really only about him. Perhaps this profound lesson of caution is all we can take from a **taker.**

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5764-korach/

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## Korach: Leadership and Holiness: Status or Sacred Duty?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018

"*For the entire community – they are all holy!"* It is with these words that Korach challenges the leadership of Moshe. These are words that on the face of them express a lofty and noble sentiment. But they are words which ultimately belie an understanding of kedushah and an understanding of leadership that is limited, self-serving, and destructive.

Korach coveted Moshe's position. He saw leadership as a lofty status, a rank, a privilege, and was envious that others should have it and not he. Not once do we hear from Korach how he would serve the people better. No. His complaint was: why do you deserve it? Why don't I?

A true leader, however, sees leadership as an obligation, a responsibility, as a sacred duty. Moshe's only goal was to serve God and to serve the people. This humblest of all men, never wanted the honor: *"God, send someone else. Anyone but me."* Of course, too much humility is also not a good thing. Had Moshe had his way, he never would have become leader, and a leader who does not recognize his role and his status will ultimately fall short of leading and serving the people properly. *"If you are small in your own eyes"* – says Shmuel to King Shaul – you do not have the luxury for this humility, for *"you are the head of all the tribes of Israel."* Status is important. But one who leads for the sake of the honor serves no one but himself. If leadership comes with status it does so for a purpose: to serve and to lead others.

As it is with leadership, so it is with kedushah. For Korach, holiness was a status, a static state of being – we are all holy, we are all already holy. It was a status that implied privilege and entitlement. True kedushah, however, does not reassure us that we are better. True kedushah calls upon us to become better: *kedoshim ti'hiyu,* Holy you shall become, for I the Lord your God am holy. It points us upwards and outwards. Each day, strive to become more God-like. Strive to transform yourself, to transform the world.

At YCT, our semikha students devote much time to studying Hilkhot Kashrut and Hilkhot Shabbat. These two areas of halakha represent two distinct types of kedusha. Kashrut is an inner-focused kedushah: it is concerned with what goes into our bodies, with keeping ourselves pure. Observing the laws of kashrut makes us different, it separates us from the larger world. This is the kedushah of status. It makes us distinct and special, but like the status that comes with leadership, it does so for a purpose. Not for the purpose of our finding satisfaction in our own uniqueness, but to demand of us to devote ourselves to a higher calling.

Shabbat exemplifies this. Shabbat is a kedushah that is ultimately outer-focused. It starts with our being distinct – the covenant between ourselves and God – but its end is to bring holiness into larger world – the universal message of God as creator, of human dignity, of the right to rest and to be free. The holiness of Shabbat spreads into the week, making our work holy as well, pointing us towards a higher purpose, towards tikkun olam, and finally towards a world that is *mei'eyn olam ha'bah* – a more perfect world, a messianic world: *"And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Shabbat to another, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord."* (Isa. 66:23).

Four years ago our newly-minted musmakhim started their path to become rabbis for Klal Yisrael. They understood that to be a leader is not to desire for oneself to have status, but to dedicate oneself to service. They spent these last four years growing in learning, pushing themselves to become more learned, more skilled, more inspiring than the day before. Rather than settling for the complacency of being, they devoted themselves to a life of becoming.

As they now go out to serve, they may encounter communities who know only of the kedushah of status, the kedushah of being. This kedushah is important and necessary, and they must and will protect and sustain it, the treasured holiness and distinctiveness of their communities. Much of their work will be devoted to exactly this: carefully tending to their communities' religious needs, making sure that there are daily minyanim, that the eruv is up, and that the restaurants have the necessary hechsheirim. But while important and necessary, such a kedushah, by itself, is dangerous – dangerous to those outside the community and dangerous to the religious and moral health of the community.

A kedushah that is concerned just about its existing status inevitably cultivates complacency and self-satisfaction. It produces a community – be it a neighborhood, a synagogue or a school – that is monolithic that is concerned solely with reinforcing its sense of itself, one that is will push out those who are different, those who may threaten its narrowly-defined identity. People of lesser observance or of different beliefs, people in non-traditional families, gay men and women, people with disabilities – be they physical, psychological, leaning, or social-emotional – all of these will be perceived of as threats to this kedushah, a kedushah that must be preserved at all costs.

This kedushah alone may not be allowed to define a community. The Torah that our musmakhim will teach will be one that inspires people to think not that they are already holy, but that they must strive every day to become holy. They will teach their communities and their students not only the kedushah of kashrut, but also the kedushah of Shabbat, of service, of *li'takein olam bi'malkhut Sha-dai.* They will teach them that the kedushah of becoming holy is not a starting point, but a destination, a destination always to be reached for, yet never to be grasped.

This is a kedusha not of haughtiness, but of humility; not of wariness, but of welcome. It is a kedushah that does not tell us that we are better than the rest of the world, but that asks us what it is that we can do to make the world a better place.

The students that we are blessed to have at YCT have come to us because it was this type of kedushah that spoke to them. They come with a vision that drives them to serve the Modern Orthodox community and all of Klal Yisrael, to serve observant and non-observant, those in the center and those at the margins. This vision rejects complacency, it forces them to leave their comfort zones, it pushes them to make Orthodoxy better, to make Klal Yisrael better, to make the world better. It is a belief in a kedusha that sanctifies the world and that inspires us to become a better person today than they were the day before. And it is belief in a leadership that teaches that a life of *"the entire community is all holy,"* can only truly find purpose when it translates into a life of *"you shall become holy,"* a life of bringing ourselves, and the entire world, closer to God, closer to perfection.

based on Semikha Remarks, 2013

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

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## Criticism or Contempt: Thoughts for Parashat Korah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

We might refine this explanation by considering two words: criticism and contempt. Hillel and Shammai were critical of each other's views on certain matters. They marshaled arguments to bolster their own views and to refute the views of the other. Criticism aims at undermining the arguments of the opponent, not at discrediting the opponent's character. People

who are critical of each other's viewpoints can still sit together and offer their cases and refutations. Even if neither side is convinced to change his/her mind, the debate can be civil and respectful.

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

https://www.jewishideas.org/criticism-or-contempt-thoughts-parashat-korah

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## The Golden Age in Spain: How golden was it?

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In 2006, Oxford University Press published a book by Chris Lowney, *A Vanished World: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Medieval Spain.* The author asked me to write a blurb, and it was included on the back cover of the book. Here is what I wrote:

> *"Chris Lowney has written a meaningful book about interfaith cooperation and interfaith antagonism in medieval Spain. While it points to the many failures of those days, it also suggests important triumphs of the human spirit. Can we learn from this story and shape a better, more harmonious world? Can we afford not to learn from this story?"*

An underlying theme of Lowney's book, like so many publications dealing with Islamic Spain, is that Jews and Christians fared reasonably well under enlightened Islamic rule. While life was not always perfect, it was much better for religious minorities in Islamic Spain than in Christian Europe.

Historians refer to a *"Golden Age"* for Jews of Spain. The Wiki Encyclopedia entry for the Golden Age states:

> *"The nature and length of this 'Golden Age' has been a subject of much debate, as there were at least three Golden Ages interrupted by periods of oppression of Jews and non-Jews. A few scholars give the start of the Golden Age as 711–718, the Muslim conquest of Iberia. Others date it from 912, under the rule of Abd-ar-Rahman III. The end of the age is variously given as 1031, when the Caliphate of Cordoba ended, 1066, the date of the Granada massacre, 1090, when the Almoravides invaded, or the mid-12th century, when the Almohades invaded."*

Many authors laud *"convivencia"* — the generally peaceful co-existence in Medieval Spain that allowed Muslims, Christians and Jews to live in harmony. It is clear that Jewish culture blossomed in Islamic Spain, with the emergence of great poets, grammarians, Bible scholars, talmudists, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and more.

The blurb I wrote for Chris Lowney's book reflects my doubts about the extent of Islamic tolerance of Jews and Christians. I wanted to be sure to mention that interfaith antagonism existed and that there were lapses in tolerance. But I also indicated that there were important triumphs of the human spirit, and that we today can learn much of value for maintaining a c*onvivencia* in our own times, a respectful and mutually beneficial harmony among people of various religions.

I was right about the failures that occurred under Islamic Spain. But was I right in pointing to that era as a positive model for religious co-existence? Was I too optimistic? Was I engaging in wishful thinking? Was I influenced by the overwhelming praise, by many authors and teachers, of the tolerance of Islamic Spain, and by the ubiquitous lauding of *convivencia*?

These questions have come to mind as I've been reading a newly published book, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain,* by Dario Fernandez-Morera, (ISI Books, Wilmington, 2016). The author is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Northwestern University.

While various scholars have pointed to problems and low points during Islamic rule in Spain, Dr. Fernandez-Morera goes much further. His bold argument is that the notion of Islamic tolerance of Jews and Christians is a myth — it is simply not true. The idea of c*onvivencia* — the mutual cooperation and harmony among Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Spain — belongs more to the realm of propaganda than to history.

The author quotes numerous scholars who shower praise on Islamic tolerance, on the remarkable "Golden Age" in interreligious cooperation. But he argues that these authors were engaging in "political correctness," the fashionable presentation of a tolerant and benevolent Islam. He draws on writings of people who lived in Islamic Spain, people who described what life was actually like in their times. He draws on extensive scholarly sources, on archaeological discoveries, as well as on the abundant secondary literature of more recent scholars.

Dr. Fernandez-Morera notes that the famed Umayyad dynasty were followers of the Maliki school of Islam which had little love for non-Muslims. The early Muslim conquerors of Spain and their successors systematically razed churches or turned them into Mosques. They imposed Islamic law on Christians and Jews — known as People of the Book — which made it very clear that the minorities were to be subservient to Muslims. Although granted relative freedom to conduct their communities according to their own religious traditions, Christians and Jews were *"dhimmis"* — an underclass of "protected people" who had to pay a special tax for the privilege of living under Islamic hegemony.

Dr. Fernandez-Morera writes: *"In short, Islamic Spain enjoyed no harmonious convivencia; rather, Muslims, Christians, and Jews had a precarious coexistence. Members of the three communities had to come into contact now and then. Sometimes they did business, or collaborated with one another, or dwelled near one another."* (p. 117) Of course, as in all societies, kinder people interacted more kindly with those of the other groups. And of course, there are examples of

periods of relative quiet. And there were individual Jews and Christians who rose to positions of power and influence. Nonetheless, the massive reality was that *"dhimmis"* were subject to ongoing humiliation, segregation, and violence.

The *"dhimmi"* regulations imposed a special tax on Christians and Jews. Various rules were intended to humiliate *"dhimmis"* and remind them of their subservient positions. Writing about restrictions placed on Jews in Islamic Spain, Dr. Fernandez-Morera notes that Jews *"must not ride horses. They must show deference to Muslims. They must not give court evidence against a Muslim…They must not proselytize….They must not dress in such an ostentatious manner as to offend poorer Muslims…."* (p. 180)

While Jewish communities continued to exist in Islamic Spain, Christian communities declined and ultimately disappeared. *"By the end of the twelfth century, as a result of flight (or 'migration') to Christian lands, expulsions to North Africa, executions and conversions, the Christian "dhimmi" population had largely disappeared from al-Andalus. When Christians entered Granada in 1492, there were no Christian "dhimmis" in the city."* (p. 208).

Professor Fernandez-Morera's book has a clear point of view. He is especially interested in highlighting the strengths and virtues of Visigothic Spain before the arrival of the Muslims in 711. He praises the Christian re-conquest of Spain. Had it not been for the *"Reconquista,"* Islamic rule might not only have prevailed over all of Spain, but might have spread further into Europe. This would have led to the fostering of religious discrimination, the low status of women, the inhibiting of intellectual freedom; it would have precluded the emergence of the Renaissance, and would have left the Western world in the same general condition as the rest of the Muslim world.

While some of the arguments of Dr. Fernandez-Morera seem over-stretched and even polemical, the overall impact of his research and his book must make one stop to think more carefully about the *"Andalusian Paradise"* and *convivencia*. Are scholars and politicians perpetuating this myth because it serves a useful purpose, because they — and we — want to believe it? How nice it would be to know that there was a time and place when Muslims, Christians and Jews worked side by side in mutual respect and kindness. How nice to think that it is possible for Islamic rule to be tolerant and benevolent.

President Barack Obama, in a speech at Cairo University, June 4, 2009, stated*: "Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition [sic]."* Prime Minister Tony Blair *wrote ("Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2007): *"The standard-bearers of tolerance in the early Middle Ages were far more likely to be found in Muslim lands than in Christian ones."*

These politicians, relying on wishful and mythological thinking, seek to appease the Muslim countries and to glorify Muslim achievements. Perhaps they think they will thereby convince current day Muslim leaders to embrace the myth of Islamic tolerance, thereby creating bridges between the Muslim world and the West.

Dr. Fernandez-Morera has pointed to the unpleasant and politically incorrect reality that Muslim rule was *"tolerant"* to Christians and Jews, but only if the *"dhimmis"* were in a clearly defined inferior position, subservient to Muslims. This is hardly a framework for mutual respect and equal rights.

When I wrote my blurb for Chris Lowney's book, I wondered: *"Can we learn from this story and shape a better, more harmonious world? Can we afford not to learn from this story?"* When I wrote those words, I obviously harbored the belief — the hope — that there was a period of convivencia that can be a model for us today. I thought that it would be foolish for us to ignore the positive aspects of life in Medieval Spain.

After reading Dario Fernandez-Morera's book, I could write these same words, but with a very different meaning. Rephrased, my blurb for today would read: *"Can we learn from the story of religious persecution and humiliation that characterized Islamic Spain? Can we learn to shape a better, more harmonious world by insisting on genuine respect, equality, decency, and theological humility among all religions? Can we afford not to learn these lessons?"*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/golden-age-spain-how-golden-was-it

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## Shelach – When All Else Fails. . .

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

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!

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

Rabbi Rhine is on summer vacation for a few weeks. He has given me permission to use some of his achived Devrei Torah during his absence.

From my archives.

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## Korach – Mourning the Wicked

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

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

Immediately after they perished, while the fires of the incense offerings were still burning in all of the pans, Hashem commands that Elazar, Aharaon's son, should take all of the pans and discard the flames. The pans should then be

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## Korah – Korah Was Right!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

As preposterous and incorrect as the title of this article might sound, the Midrash seems to build a very strong case for Korach, suggesting that he was right in his struggle. But the Midrashic Korach is the opposite of the Biblical one. The Biblical Korach does not utter one word during the dramatic and disastrous rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, while the Midrashic one is an articulate and compelling orator. Indeed, the speeches given by the Midrashic Korach during his campaign reverberate with many Jews today as they complain about the rampant corruption in the corridors of the religious establishment.

Here is how, according to the Midrash, Korach was able to create a faithful following and to threaten Moshe:

*He gathered the whole community and addressed them with words of mockery.*
*In my neighborhood, he said, there lived a poor widow with her two orphan daughters.*
*She had one field, but when she was about to plow it Moshe came and warned her against harnessing a donkey and an ox together.*

*When she wanted to sow he came again to tell her not to sow a mixture of seeds.*
*During harvest he demanded that she leave the corner of the field and the fallen stalks, and after harvest he reminded her that she must separate tithes for the Cohanim and the Levites.*
*The poor woman decided to sell her field and buy sheep, but when they first gave birth, Aharon came and claimed the firstborn.*

*When she sheared them, Aharon paid her a visit to remind her that the first wool belongs to the Cohen.*

*Seeing that there is no refuge from the ongoing demands, she decided to slaughter the sheep and at least enjoy her last meal, but alas, her plan was foiled by Aharon who came to receive the portions of the Cohen.*

*"That's it!" exclaimed the poor woman, "I cannot it take it anymore" and she announced that the sheep will become Herem – forbidden to use.*

*"If so", said Aharon, "they all belong to me," and he picked up his loot and left her crying with her two orphan daughters.*

*"Is this a way to treat a poor woman?" concluded Korach, "they all behave like that and claim that HaShem commanded them to do so." )Midrash Tehillim, Ps. 1(*

What is truly disconcerting about this speech is that it has strong supporters among Jews of all affiliations and levels of observance. The more orthodox complain, albeit quietly, about some religious establishment and entities where there is no accountability, responsibility or self-monitoring, and the less observant argue that they keep away from religion because of its invasive nature and its tight grip on every aspect of normal life. So honestly, why did the rabbis provide the tight-lipped, taciturn Korach with such a platform to promulgate his heretical and destructive ideas?

The answer is that the rabbis used, very cleverly, the Biblical Korach to attack the maladies of their contemporary society. Korach of the Torah says nothing, because his arguments hold no ground, and his punishment, being swallowed by the earth, is therefore very appropriate. Korach of the Midrash on the other hand, becomes very elaborate in the hands of the rabbis so they can direct him, as a weapon, against the corrupt Cohanim and those who have abandoned the path of Torah.

The first half of Korach's speech is a mockery of those who complain that the Mitzvoth are a burden. The pieces of the story he tells do not really connect to each other or to the supposed distress of the widow. First, the prohibitions against harnessing different species or sowing different seeds are not ones which cause great effort or toil, but rather require awareness and help grow one's spiritual status. The other demands that Aharon makes regarding the corner of the field and the tithes are not about things given to the Cohen but to the poor, therefore supporting and promoting social justice. In short, the rabbis try to show that a lot of those who complain that it is difficult to observe the Mitzvoth are stringing together irrelevant complaints or fail to look into the deep meaning and purpose of the mitzvoth.

The second half, however, is much more intriguing and sophisticated, because Korach's criticism of Moshe and Aharon uses the same arguments the rabbis leveled against the corrupt Cohanim of their time.

The rabbis said, for example, that a Cohen who volunteers to help at the field to receive the tithes from the field owner should not be given those tithes )Bekhorot 26, 2(. It is a measure meant to prevent the degradation of the status of the Cohanim into a class of parasites selling their life and dignity for gifts from the wealthy landlords. The rabbis were afraid that the Cohanim would repeat the pattern of the First Temple and the early years of the Second Temple, and they quote the prophet Malakhi, who rebukes the Cohanim for using the Temple and the tithes as their private treasury.

The gluttony of the Cohanim and their detachment from the people who rely on their services is demonstrated in this touching Midrash )VaYikra Rabbah, 3, 5(:

> *A poor woman brought her sacrifice of flour, but the Cohen mocked her, saying "what is there to eat in this meager offering." At night, the Cohen was told in a dream to be careful with people like her because their small offering represents for them a substantial part of their income, and it is for them as if they sacrificed their souls.*

It is amazing to see that the complaint with which Korach concludes his speech is the same the rabbis direct at the Cohanim of their time: robbing the poor and ignoring their strife.

There are several other Midrashim and sources which are beyond the scope of this article, but they all point to a very grim reality towards the end of the Second Temple period and the immense efforts the rabbis invested in changing that attitude. It also shows that the Cohanim wielded tremendous power, to the extent of forcing the rabbis to work in secrecy. The reality is that the Cohanim became corrupt and used their position to accumulate wealth. The result was stripping the Temple from its sanctity and driving people away from Judaism, and we are still working hard today to remedy the aftermath of that disastrous period.

So, in conclusion, we have seen that the Midrash was crafted brilliantly to address contemporary problems. Corruption and oppression by the religious elite is not a new phenomenon, and it is incumbent upon us to demand honesty and transparency from our religious leadership.

I would like to offer just one advice from my great grandfather Hakham Yehuda Fetaya zt"l, author of *Beth Lehem Yehuda on Etz Hahayim of the Arizal.* He was a great Mekubal, and his blessings were known to be always effective, and as my grandfather told me he would warn people against going to rabbis who demand anything in return for their blessings or prayers. HaShem is the source and the cause, and you can pray directly to Him, he would say. If the rabbi, the mystic, the Tazdik or whatever his title is, requests a payment for his blessings, even if it is just implied and even if it is a donation or just an honor, such as being a sandak in return for praying for a baby boy, it is forbidden to receive blessings from that person. According to R. Yehuda Fetaya, the only allowed way is for the rabbi to suggest that the receiver of the blessing will give charity to any cause he chooses, without any need to notify the rabbi about it.

This approach will address both claims put in Korach's mouth by the rabbis. First, the leaders are not taking advantage of the people, and second, they send the message that the purpose of the Torah is to help everyone through the observance of mitzvoth, whether at the individual, communal, national or global level.

Shabbat Shalom

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(.

## Who Was Korach?

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Was he a villainous madman or a misunderstood revolutionary?

This week the Torah tells the story of how he led a rebellion against Moses in the desert claiming that Moses unfairly elevated himself over all the Jews. Korach made the argument that all Jews are equally holy in G-d's eyes, so how can Moses have authority over them?

Moses claims that G-d himself chose this method, not him, and after failed negotiations challenged Korach to bring incense as an offering to G-d if Korach thought he was worthy. Korach does so and gets swallowed up by a hole in the desert.

While no one takes Korach's side, many commentators, notably the Jewish mystic Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg, claim Korach's ideas had merit but he just went about it in the wrong way. To rebel against Moses, the great leader who had led the Jews out of Egypt, was uncalled for. However, the idea of all Jews being holy and having the authority to author their own spiritual journey is a great idea that we should encourage.

Are we not implementing this idea nowadays? So many Jews continue to find their own unique path of devotion within our sacred tradition, such as art, music and sport. On our site in Remuera, we house many different expressions and ways of connecting to Judaism.

A Rabbi of mine had a name for this. He called it **creating multiple portals of spiritual entry.** May we continue to create such portals here at 514 Remuera, with everyone's help.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

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## Rav Kook Torah
## Korach: Inclusion and Selection *

While the Midrash appears to belittle Korach's dispute as foolish, the argument that Korach put forth — *"All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst"* )Num. 16:3( — does not seem silly at all. Is not Korach simply restating what God told the entire nation, *"You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy"* )Lev. 19:2(? What was so wrong with his claim? Why did Moses insist that only Aaron and his descendants could serve as priests?

**Korach's mistake is rooted in the dialectic between two distinct forms of divine providence: inclusion )kirvah(, and selection )bechirah(.** During certain periods, the service of God was inclusive, available to all. At other times, God chose certain persons or places to bear a higher level of sanctity, in order to elevate the rest of the world through them. ]emphasis added[

**The Temple and the Bamot**

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

Until the Tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, individuals were permitted to offer sacrifices on private altars throughout the country. During the 369 years that the Tabernacle stood in Shiloh, these bamot were prohibited, and all offerings had to

be brought to the central service in Shiloh. After the destruction of the Shiloh Tabernacle, the bamot were again permitted. With the selection of the city of Jerusalem and the building of the Temple on Mount Moriah, however, the bamot were banned forever.

When permitted, these private altars could be established in any location. They allowed all to approach God; even non-priests could offer sacrifices. The periods when bamot were permitted reflect an inclusive form of divine worship, enabling all to approach God and serve Him.

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

**Pillar Service**

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

In Moses' day, however, serving God through pillars became forbidden )Deut. 16:22(. After the election of the Jewish people, it became necessary to first elevate the people of Israel. Only afterwards will the rest of the world attain recognition of God. Divine service thereafter required boundaries — the walls of the Tabernacle and Temple — in order to cultivate the holiness within.

**Prophecy Only in Israel**

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

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

**Korach's Vision**

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

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

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

* “Korach was a clever fellow — what did he see to get involved in this folly? His mind’s eye fooled him. He saw by prophetic vision that a line of great men would descend from him, including the prophet Samuel, who was the equal of Moses and Aaron together.” *)Midrash Tanchuma* 5(. Note: this quote fits in with Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah, above.

https://ravkooktorah.org/KORACH63.htm

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## Korach: How Not to Argue (5780)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[** ]emphasis added[

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

**FOOTNOTES:**

]1[ Mishnah Avot 5:17.

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

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

]4[ Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 13b.

**Around the Shabbat Table**:

]1[ Are the leaders in your country more similar to Hillel, Shammai, and Moses, or Korach?

]2[ Where can you see arguments in society today that are not "for the sake of heaven"?

]3[ Why is it so important to listen to the other side even when you are sure you are right?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/how-not-to-argue/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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## Houses or Households?

By Yossy Goldman *

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

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

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

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

According to the Biblical commentator Ibn Ezra,2 "houses" should not be taken literally at all. It does not mean a 'house' but 'household,' i.e., one's family. In his own words, house is *"a broad term for wife, children, and toddlers."*
Might I humbly suggest an alternative understanding: in the arrogant Korach's eyes, his little tent must have seemed an imposing mansion, a palace of his own delusions of grandeur.

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

**House or Home?**

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

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

**Bringing Home Education**

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

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

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

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

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

**FOOTNOTES:**

1. Numbers 16:32,33

2. 12th century, Spain

* Life Rabbi Emeritus of the  Sydenham Shul, Johannesburg, South Africa; and President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

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

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## Korach:  The Challenge of Affluence

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

Korach bolstered his rebellion by pointing out that by decreeing that they must wander for 40 years in the desert, due to the event with spies, Moses had broken his promise to the people.

> *"You have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Even if you gouge out the eyes of those men, we will not go up."* )Num. 16:14(

When the spies reported back to the people after scouting out the Land of Israel, the first thing they said was that it was *"flowing with milk and honey."* While this was true, their intent was to imply that it was impossible to conquer the land. Showing the people the abnormally large fruit that they had brought back with them, they said, *"Just like the fruit of the land is huge, so are its inhabitants huge and mighty, and we can never overcome them."*

Allegorically, the spies were implying that because there is so much material abundance and luxury readily available in the Land of Israel, it is impossible to maintain a spiritual perspective on life, let alone spread Divine consciousness in this environment.

In our own lives, too, the drive toward material success and the draw of material luxury can be formidable obstacles to a spiritual life. We must therefore realize that G-d gives us lives *"flowing with milk and honey"* in order to utilize these gifts for holy purposes, transforming the *"land"* into His true home. With this in mind, we indeed conquer materiality, maintaining and disseminating Divine consciousness.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

*  An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Beha'alotecha from our *Daily Wisdom #3*  by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

**Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet**

Sponsored by Saadia & Lily Greenberg
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**Volume 31, Issue 35** **Shabbat Parashat Korach** **5785 B"H**

**Covenant and Conversation**
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**Taking It Personally**

When we read the story of Korach, our attention tends to be focused on the rebels. We don't give as much reflection as we might to the response of Moses. Was it right? Was it wrong? It's a complex story. As the Ramban explains, it is no accident that the Korach rebellion happened in the aftermath of the story of the spies. So long as the people expected to enter the Promised Land, they stood to lose more than they could gain by challenging Moses 'leadership. He had successfully negotiated all obstacles in the past. He was their best hope. But now a whole generation was condemned to die in the wilderness. Now they had nothing to lose. When people have nothing to lose, rebellions happen.

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

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

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

What was Moses 'reaction to their rebellion? His first response is to propose a simple, decisive test: Let everyone bring an offering of incense, and then let God decide whose to accept. But the derisive, insolent response of Datan and Aviram seems to unnerve him. He turns to God and says: "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them." Num. 16:15

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

God then threatens to punish the whole congregation. Moses and Aaron intercede on their behalf. God tells Moses to separate the community from the rebels so that they will not be caught up in the punishment, which Moses does. But he then does something unprecedented. He says: "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all humankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." Num. 16:28-30

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

God does as Moses asks. Naturally we expect that this will end the rebellion: God has sent an unmistakable sign that Moses was right, the rebels wrong. But it doesn't. Far from ending the rebellion, things now escalate: The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the Lord's people," they said. Num. 17:6

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

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

The Harvard leadership expert, Ronald Heifetz, makes the point that it is essential for a leader to distinguish between role and self. A role is a position we hold. The self is who we are. Leadership is a role. It is not an identity. It is not who we are. Therefore a leader should never take an attack on their leadership personally: It's a common ploy to personalise the debate over issues as a strategy for taking you out of action . . . You want to respond when you are attacked . . . You want to leap into the fray when you are mischaracterised . . . When people attack you personally, the reflexive reaction is to take it personally . . . But being criticised by people you care about is almost always a part of exercising leadership . . . When you take personal attacks personally, you unwittingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of action – you make yourself the issue. *[Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Leadership on the Line, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, pp. 130, 190-191.]*

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

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



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

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

Heifetz writes: " Receiving anger. . . is a sacred task . . . Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change." Ibid. pp. 142-146.

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

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

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

**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

**Good and Bad Controversies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This fundamental respect for the challenge of alternative opinions – so basic to the Talmudic mind – is rooted in another Mishna (Sanhedrin 37a), which sees the greatness of God in the differences among individuals and the pluralism of ideas. "Unlike an individual who mints coins from one model and every coin is

exactly alike, the Holy One blessed be He has fashioned every human being in the likeness of Adam, and yet no human being is exactly like his fellow! And just as the appearances of human beings are not alike, so are the ideas of human beings not alike." It is precisely in everyone's uniqueness that we see the greatness of the Creator.

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

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

### Too Wise, Too Foolish

The rebellion of Korah constituted a trauma of major proportions in biblical history. The whole enterprise of Moses -- the spiritual reconstruction of his people, their political liberation, their psychological emancipation from a slave mentality, the development of a "holy nation and kingdom of priests" -- was jeopardized by the demagogic Korah and his band of malcontents. In retrospect, Korah was doomed from the outset. Moses, after all, was not a leader by his own choice, but had this mission imposed on him by Providence. So, in effect, Korah was rebelling against G-d. Hence, Rashi was moved to quote the Sages in exclaim Korah, who was so clever, how did he become involved in such foolishness? But the Kotzker Rebbe adds two or three words to that quotation from Rahi which provide us with a new insight. To Rashi's words, how did Korah, such a clever man, get involved in the foolishness of being clever! He means to say that, at the time, Korah appeared to have everything going for him. The people were afflicted with widespread discontent, with fear, with want, with jealousy of Moses, with feelings that Moses and Aaron and Miriam were nepotistic. Yet the fatal mistake of Korah was not שטות(foolishness) as such, but quite the opposite: he was too sharp, too brilliant, too capable.

Is this contravened by the Yiddish proverb the bride is too beautiful…? Not quite. Korah, according to the Kotzker Rebbe, is teaching us that it is foolish to be too clever. Korah's very sharpness was a sign of his dullness; his very astuteness was a symptom of his want of intelligence; his very shrewdness was the stuff of stupidity.

It is an old truth (and truth does not dilute with age) that was known to the sages of all cultures and all times. Thus, Jeremiah taught "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." And his contemporary Aristotle taught that vice is virtue taken to excess. Earlier yet, the Greeks were aware that hubris (pride, arrogance) leads to the revenge of Nemesis...

Our whole society suffers from this tendency to value intelligence as an end in itself, without moral dimensions. It is true of our science and technology, which have for so long proclaimed an indifference to the moral consequences and social implications of their activities; to business, which piously proclaims only one goal, that of profit; to law and to journalism and to a hundred other professions.

That is why I personally subscribe to the thesis of James Madison, one of our Founding Fathers, that democracy is based not on the naive and romantic faith in man's innate goodness, but quite the contrary, on an expectation that groups of men, like individuals, will be motivated only by their self-interest. Each group tends to extremes in order to achieve its aims. Democracy means that we allow all the groups of society to come into a tension with each other, and in the interplay of forces, each group cancels the overreaching of other groups. This is the theory of checks and balances. Yet, despite all of this, it sometimes happens that one or several groups rip apart the social and political fabric by just being too smart and too successful.

The Yom Kippur War proved it for Israel. The Israelis fought valiantly and heroically. But they realize now, as do all of us, the danger of fhe arrogance that comes from being too smart. We foolishly tried to be clever, and imagined that our superiority was unmovable, ingrained, and permanent. We therefore become negligent and careless. But if for Israel our overshrewdness was expressed in negligence, no such mitigation can be provided for what happened in the USA. Here, a band of sharp-headed but small-minded men overreached themselves by trying to do in the opposition with impunity. But the Watergate gangsters succeeded only in out-smarting themselves. During the entire course of the exposure of this sordid affair, we are often moved to wonder how foolish of them to be so smart! At every step, at every --fresh revelation, in this sordid and dirty business, I have been shocked at how supposedly brilliant men do such foolish things. But I am convinced the solution lies in the Kotzker formula: They are being too smart, too shrewd — foolishly so. The same worry about an excess of success, a superfluity of brilliance, leads one to apprehension and ambiguity about our Secretary of State. One must of course admire his unquestioned genius. But is that a guarantee of peace? — of the welfare of the United States? - of the survival of Israel? His recently proposed compromise figure of 45,000 Jews to emigrate from Russia every year sounds good, yet it also sounds quite hollow when you read that, in anticipation of President Nixon's arrival in Moscow, Russian-Jewish activists are being chased, persecuted, arrested. Some good omen for the success of Kissinger's policy!

In religious life per se, too, we must beware of the foolishness of being too wise, too smart. Knowledge remains the highest goal of the Jewish spiritual enterprise. But never is it valued without a spiritual-moral commitment, and never with arrogance.

I have always been fond of the statement of R. Nachman Bratzlaver that no matter how educated a man is in the ways of Torah, in the ways of G-d, and in the ways of the world, when he rises for prayer, let him throw out all his knowledge, all his sophistication, all his wisdom, over his shoulder — and stand before G-d childlike, simple, plain.

All our philosophy, all our learning, all our ratiocination is as naught before Him. Surely each of us knows some people who think they are sophisticated when they are only indulging in sophistry!

Permit me to cite a famous mishnah in Avot which I shall consciously misinterpret — in order to illustrate my point. The Rabbis said who is a wise man? One who learns from "every man." My "misinterpretation" (in the sense that this was obviously not the original intent of the author) is to read "Who is a wise man? One who learns from everything" — from all of life, from all of experience, from all individuals — that "man."

We are only human. We are only men and women. We are limited and mortal and finite and inadequate and fallible. The merely פיקח (the shrewd man) thinks he has monopolized understanding and learning. The חכם(wise man) is one who knows how much remains inaccessible to man and forever closed to his probing intellect. The foolish "sharpie" imagines that his smartness will save him. The חכם distrusts an exaggerated view of wisdom itself.

Korah was only a פיקח, a "shrewdie," and he thought he could outsmart the whole world. So he proved to be a שוטה, a fool. But the חכם, the truly wise man, knows how easy it is to fall into the pit of שטות, or stupidity; he knows that with every advance in knowledge or insight we walk on a thin line, on the rim of an abyss of foolishness, so that one error, one misstep — and our wisdom has begotten us eternal folly. Therefore, the truly wise man humbly acknowledges that there is no true knowledge without faith, no wisdom without morality, no advancement of man without the greater knowledge that he is also a שוטה, a fool.

Perhaps this is what Isaiah meant in his great Messianic vision - usually translated, "The

world will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord." But then the Hebrew should have read דעת ה' not דעה את ה' Why the "את' which sometimes means "with." Hence: the world will be filled with knowledge — all kinds of knowledge: religious and secular, spiritual and scientific, economic and psychological — את ה' — with the Lord, accompanied by and restrained by and graced by the healing trust and faith in G-d, and the humility that comes with it.

Only when faith is combined with knowledge, when the Lord is acknowledged along with the exercise of one's own intelligence, are we ready for the Messiah. Only then are we worthy of redemption.

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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

There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to when exactly the story of Korach transpired. The Torah places it after Parshas Shelach, immediately following the gezeyra (heavenly decree) that Bnei Yisrael must wander in the desert for forty years as a punishment for the incident of the meraglim (spies). The Ibn Ezra holds that this parsha is not placed in its correct sequential order, and the story of Korach actually happened prior to the incident of the meraglim.

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

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

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

There is a very important Ramban that addresses this question. The Ramban writes that up until this point, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to ride out any crises that developed in leading the nation. Even after the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf), Moshe was able to pray for the nation and acquire Divine forgiveness. He writes that Moshe achieved extreme popularity amongst the people and they would not countenance any challenge to his leadership. The people loved Moshe Rabbeinu and would stone any person who attempted to question their beloved leader.

According to the Ramban, Korach suffered in silence while Moshe's popularity was at its peak. Korach "kept his powder dry" so to speak. However, when they arrived at Midbar Paran, things started falling apart. People were burned by fire at Taveirah and there were many deaths at Kivros haTa'avah. After the aveira of the meraglim, Moshe did not even pray for forgiveness and was unable to cancel the Heavenly Decree. At this point, the people's spirit plunged and they had complaints about their leader. Korach felt that this was the time to make his move. He thought that now the people would listen to his message of rebellion.

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

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

The Ramban clarifies his intention: Moshe Rabbeinu was, in effect, able to get the punishment decree for the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav nullified. "…On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them. " (Shemos 32:34). While the Ribono shel Olam did, in effect, leave that aveira on the back burner, His original threat of total annihilation was withdrawn. However, by the aveira of the meraglim, the Ramban writes: "Perhaps Moshe knew that the decree was stretched out against them and would never be rescinded." Moshe understood that the best he could accomplish was to mitigate Hashem's decree of wiping out the entire nation right then, followed by rebuilding Klal Yisrael just from Moshe Rabbeinu and his descendants. Moshe did accomplish getting rescinded the decree for the nation to be wiped out immediately. It took forty years for that generation to die out, but at least the following generation was permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael.

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

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

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

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

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

Jewish leader not to care about the people. A leader who doesn't care cannot be my leader!

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

**Egalitarianism Leads to Baseless Hatred**

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

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

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

The Be'er Moshe answers that this question is based on a mistaken premise: It is not true that when you believe everyone is the same that there will not be baseless hatred. To the contrary: When there is a prevailing mindset that everyone is the same, that is when there will be sinas chinam. If everyone is the same "So, why are YOU the leader?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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

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

The opening word of Korach actually encapsulates the whole reason why everything went wrong. What is that opening word?
'Vayikach' – 'he (Korach) took'.
What it means in that context is that Korach took himself aside, he separated himself from others and he contended with Moshe and Aharon, challenging their leadership.
This led to a split in the nation. It was horrific. It was tantamount to a brief civil war and as a result, Korach and his followers suffered an awful death.

But what was at the root of this machloket, this conflict? For Korach it wasn't a 'machloket L'shem Shamayim' – it was not for the sake of heaven, it was for the sake of himself.
'Vayikach' – he wanted to take power, importance, yichus, significance, wealth.
It was all self-serving, not a single element of his leadership had the welfare or the future of the nation in mind.

I think it happens quite often that leaders of all sorts have big egos. It shouldn't really be the case, but even where there's a big ego, one still needs to be in a position of authority and leadership, for the sake of those whom one is serving.

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

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

**Reflections on Dispute in Times of Dispute**
**Tal Numan**

Our story is a familiar one. Three groups join forces to challenge the leadership of Moshe: Korach and his assembly, Datan and Aviram, and the 250 leaders of the congregation. The Torah details the accusations of the first two groups. Korach's claim is: "Ye take too much

upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Bemdibar 16:3).

Datan and Aviram's claim is: "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, but thou must needs make thyself also a prince over us?" (ibid. 13).

Korach's argument seems reasonable and even aligns with Moshe's own statement to Yehoshua regarding Eldad and Medad: "Art thou jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them! (Bemidbar 11:29).

In contrast, the accusations of Datan and Aviram are not based on truth. Egypt is described as "a land flowing with milk and honey," and Moshe is accused of causing the death of the Israelites in the wilderness and of tyrannical leadership—both severe and unfounded claims. As the Ramban writes, these statements likely stem from the accumulated bitterness of the people of Israel following the sin of the spies. Realizing that they must wander in the wilderness for many years, their frustration is vented on Moshe, and such accumulated bitterness often distorts the perception of reality.

Nevertheless, whether the claims are based on truth or falsehood, this is not the first nor the last complaint of the people in the wilderness. So why does Moshe respond so harshly to this particular dispute? What is so severe about this sin specifically? Why, in response to this sin, does God, at Moshe's initiative, create a new phenomenon where the earth opens its mouth and swallows Korach and his assembly? "But if the Lord brings about something unprecedented, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them…" (Bemidbar 16:30).

Moreover, we might ask, what is the significance of the punishment and how is it connected to the sin of Korach and his followers?

Regarding the first question, many commentators suggest that Korach undermined Moshe's authority as the transmitter of God's law, thereby damaging a fundamental principle of Judaism—the belief in Moshe as God's messenger. Another interpretation is that the severity of Korach's dispute with Moshe does not lie in the disagreement itself but in the manner and root of the conflict. Korach's actions were driven by jealousy, leading to a non-substantive debate aimed not at seeking truth but at gaining power.

The Sages have already labeled Korach's dispute and his followers as "a dispute not for the sake of Heaven": "Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is viable; but one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not viable. Which is a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. And which is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company" (Pirkei Avot 5:17).

A dispute, in itself, is not necessarily negative. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to clarify the truth. The diversity of opinions broadens the scope and enriches the discourse. Disputes sharpen different perspectives and can reveal new aspects of reality.

What then, is a non-viable dispute? Let's attempt to answer this using a wonderful interpretation by the Kli Yakar on the verses describing the Creation in the Book of Bereshit. The Kli Yakar asks why on the second day of Creation, God changes the name of the firmament ["rakki'a"] to "heavens" ["shamayim"] and why the phrase "it was good" ["ki tov"] is not mentioned on this day. He explains thus:

"God did not want it to be called rakki'a because this name implies separation and division, as in the verse 'and they hammered [וירקעו, vayerake'u] out sheets of gold '[Shemot 39:3]; 'rakki'a 'means spreading out as a division. For every firmament is a dividing screen between two things, and for this reason, too, it does not say 'it was good 'on the second day, because it was the day on which division was created."

The term rakki'a may seem like a simple word, one of several used to denote the sky above. However, the words chosen to describe Creation carry deeper meanings and convey significant messages about the Creation itself. Rakki'a suggests separation and division. According to the Kli Yakar, the Creator did not want to embed separation at the heart of Creation and then pronounce it to be "good."

What is the uniqueness of the name "shamayim"? The Kli Yakar states: "It is called 'shamayim 'which signifies peace because 'shamayim 'is derived from 'esh '["fire"] and 'mayim '["water"], which made peace between them and merged to form 'shamayim'." Though shamayim is a concept which is comprised of contradictory forces with distinct differences, it is a manifestation of unity since these opposing forces have come together to create a whole entity.

According to the Kli Yakar, on the third day, God said "it was good" twice because it is written: "Let the waters be gathered together into one place." There is a search for a unifying place. Here, the Kli Yakar establishes an interesting principle: "Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven… meaning a dispute whose purpose is peace, as implied by the name shamayim."

**Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

**Disciples of Aharon**

Moshe said to Aharon, "Take the fire-pan and place on it fire from the Altar and put on incense (ketores), and go quickly to the congregation... Aharon ran into the midst of the congregation... he placed the incense and made atonement for the people. He stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped" (Bamidbar 17:11-13).

Ibn Ezra (11) explains "the ketores", refers to, "hayedu'a - the already known". The definite article (the hei hayedi'a) is absent with respect to the ketores itself. He adds cryptically, "vehamaskil yavin". How can we understand this?

Aharon was told to put incense and only then go quickly to the congregation. However, Aharon ran into the midst of the congregation, and only then placed the incense. Why these two changes?

Moshe told Aharon that the ketores would stop the plague. But Aharon did more than that; he actually stood between the dead and the living. Apparently, the incense itself achieved atonement, but Aharon's presence was necessary to stop the plague. Why?

Perhaps the answer to all these questions is the source of the plague. The paradigmatic dispute not for the sake of Heaven is the dispute of Korach and his entire assembly (Avos 5:20). Dispute is so severe that even infants, who are not punishable in earthly or Heavenly court, perished (Rashi 16:27). The only way to stop a plague caused by dispute is to emphasize the importance of unity. The word ketores is related to the word kesher, a knot, which in Aramaic is "kitra" (Shabbos 111b) (see Zohar, parshas Vayechi). Just as a knot unifies two things, the ketores represents the unity of Am Yisrael. Moreover, the inclusion of foul smelling chelbana in the ketores mandates the inclusion of sinners in this unity (Kerisus 6b).

The ketores itself sufficed for atonement, but to stop the plague required Aharon's personal intervention between the dead and the living. Aharon loved peace, pursued peace, loved b'riyos - people - and brought them close to the Torah (Avos 1:12). The Tiferes Yisrael (46) explains the use of the word, "b'riyos", which literally means, "creatures", to refer to those who are undeserving of the title Adam, person. Even those who mistreat you should be loved and thereby be brought close to the Torah.

"Seek peace and pursue it" (Tehilim 34:15). Like Aharon, seek peace from your place, pursue it in another place (Avos D'Rav Nasan 12:6). Aharon was told to go only to the congregation, but to enter into the group of rabble-rousers would be inappropriate and take him out of "his place". Yet Aharon ran into the midst of the sinners, pursuing peace in "another place".

Furthermore, as the Ramban (16:4) notes, Aharon, in his mussar and holiness, was silent during the entire dispute, implying that Korach was greater than him. Only someone like Aharon, who was so devoted to peace and unity, could, with the help of the ketores that ties all Jews to one another, stand between the dead and the living and stop the plague.

Aharon was told to put the incense on the firepan before going to the assembly. Instead, he ran into the midst of the congregation and only then put the incense into the firepan. This change is reminiscent of the positions of the Tzedukim and the Perushim, respectively, regarding the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur (Yoma 19b). Aharon compared the holy Jewish people, even the sinners, to the Holy of Holies (Kodesh Hakodoshim). Only there, in the authentic tradition, is the incense to be placed in the firepan. Only Aharon, who loved all of Hashem's creatures, could recognize the holiness in each Jew. He connected, tied, and united even sinners, as the chelbana in the ketores represents. Thereby, he achieved peace and ended the dispute and the ensuing plague.

The known firepan was the one used in the Mishkan for the ketores. But, as Ibn Ezra writes, the ketores was an unknown. It was a foreign fire (aish zara, see Vayikra 10:1), typically forbidden and punishable by death, which was the fate of Nadav and Avihu (10:2) and the two hundred and fifty accomplices of Korach (Bamidbar 16:35, see Rashi 17:13). The Netziv (17:11) states that here, too, it was not authorized by Hashem, but was allowed because piku'ach nefesh - saving lives - which overrides all such prohibitions. Unlike his sons who perished when they brought an aish zara, Aharon was rewarded for his heroic pursuit of peace, even with sinners, not in his place. His ketores was accepted (niskabel), making known that he and his descendants are the true Kohanim forever (Ramban 16:5), deserving special gifts of service and holy foods (18:7,8).

We are all commanded by Hillel to be disciples of Aharon (Avos 1:12), loving and pursuing peace, loving Hashem's creatures and bringing them close to Torah. This mandate has even greater significance today when our soldiers are fighting a murderous enemy. Many have died, and many more barely escaped with their lives, like the living near the dead saved by Aharon.

What can we, and all of Am Yisrael, do to help save our soldiers? The Yerushalmi (Peah 1:1) teaches that Achav's soldiers, although idolatrous, won their wars because there was no infighting (dil'turia). David's soldiers were tzadikim but fell in war because of internal disunity and divisiveness.

If David's soldiers were tzaddikim, why was there disunity? Perhaps they were called tzaddikim only in the realm of bein adam lamakom. Possibly, however, they were complete tzaddikim and did everything with noble intentions from their perspective. Indeed, the Netziv (16:1) writes that the two hundred and fifty renowned leaders who joined Korach (16:2) had pure intentions (kivnu l'shem shomayim). How, then, can the dispute of Korach and his entire assembly be called a dispute not for the sake of Heaven (Avos 5:20)?

The answer is that a dispute that leads to constant infighting is characterized as lo leshem shomayim notwithstanding noble intentions. An amicable split is necessary to avoid continuous divisiveness (Mishna Berurah 150, s'if kattan 2). Even in our time, some righteous individuals with the best of intentions who were involved in bitter public disputes suffered greatly in their personal lives, perhaps because of their actions. Thus, the most important lesson for good people is not, "don't be like Korach" (17:5); this is obvious! Rather, "don't be like his assembly - adaso" (ibid.), well-meaning individuals who joined an inappropriate controversy and were punished severely.

Our heightened efforts to pursue peace with all Jews with love can spell the difference between life and death for our soldiers who are in constant danger. Parshas Korach will be read on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, a month which begins the commemoration of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, which was also caused by internal divisiveness and baseless hatred (Yoma 9b). May our pursuit of peace and unity, as disciples of Aharon, protect our soldiers and lead to the renewed service of Aharon's descendants in the Beis Hamikdash.

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

And Korach took… (Bamidbar 16:1) What knocked Korach out of this world? He had so much working in his favor! He was very learned, and extremely wealthy, and as a Levi, he had a highly prestigious position amongst the Chosen People. Where could he have gone so wrong? Moshe spells out the answer in his response to Korach, "Rav L'chem Bnei Levi" – "You have plenty, son of Levi". What is the meaning of Moshe's lifesaving message?

The Mishne in Avos at the very end of Chapter 4 makes a declaration about the human condition that might just open the door to an obvious complaint. It states, "Against your will you are formed, and against your will you are born, and against your will you live, and against your will you die, and against your will you will give a detailed accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One Blessed is He!"

Now someone can easily say, "Hey! I never asked for this! Why should I have to give an accounting? If something was delivered to my house against my will, then why should I be made to pay for it? It's not fair!

Most everyone, I would assume, has struggled with some version of this question at some time. I didn't ask for this family, these siblings, or to be born. The Mishne spells out that all the stages of coming into existence and remaining alive are against our will. That itself prompts the complaint, "NO FAIR!"

The Dubner Maggid offers an amazing parable that helps explain the riddle of this Mishne. There was a couple that lived far away from city life. This was surely a match made in heaven. They had mutually complementary handicaps that made their relationship work. He was extremely ugly. She, however, was blind. She lived with total unawareness of his dreadful appearance. Now, he was also deaf, like a stone, and unable to hear the slightest sound. That was good because she was a shrill, and often could be heard making wild noises. He was completely oblivious to this. What a perfect match!

One day a doctor from the big city came to town and he took a look at this couple and having mercy upon them informed them that with the advance of modern medicine their individual maladies can be cured.

They checked into the hospital and now you can imagine the tender and magical moment when they removed the patches from her new eyes and they unplugged his newly functional ears. She got a look at him and gave a scream. She covered her eyes and he covered his ears. They went home to constant misery. It was seemingly a disaster!

Then they discover that they are being billed by the Doctor one hundred thousand dollars. They are outraged. This is an insult to injury. First, he ruins our life and then they charge us for it!? The only thing they can agree upon and collaborate together on is to go to the hospital and visit the doctor to register their common complaint and tell him, "We are not paying!" The doctor listens carefully and agrees that

they do not have to pay, but only under one condition.

He pulled out two consent forms and asked each of them to sign and then, he will readmit them and reverse the procedures. The man begins to express how much he enjoys the sound of rain against the window and the children playing, and the men singing in Shul, and pleads, "Please don't send me back into that world of silence! She also chimes in that when the sun comes into the window in the morning and everything is lit up, she excitedly studies the pageantry of colors of the flora and the fauna and the faces of little children and she pleads, "Please do not plunge me again into that world of darkness." The doctor looked at both of them incredulously and said that I see that it did benefit you and so you must pay.

Explains the Dubner Maggid, yes everything about coming into being is against our person, but when it comes to dying a person puts up a fight, "against your will you die and that reveals, even if we have legitimate gripes, we benefited and therefore we must pay with gratitude and service to HASHEM and give an ultimate accounting.

Korach had one minor complaint! Why am I not the Kohain Gadol? Moshe told him, "Look at all that you have!" You should be so happy!" Korach took! When one refuses to acknowledge the endless debt of gratitude, he owes HASHEM for all the gift of life, then he may be plunged back into darkness, and pay the ultimate price.

**Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

**Rav Doron Perez: The Original Anarchist**

The lawlessness, disobedience, hooliganism, and anarchy that we have seen in the streets of many cities and college campuses in the Unites States and around the world have been incredibly alarming. People totally undermine authority, don't listen to lawful behavior, act with civil disobedience, taking over swathes of campuses – the rise of anarchy and disobedience is alarming.

We also saw in Israel the debates over judicial reform led some leaders call for citizens to bring society down to make change. This thinking is a cogent political philosophy is known as anarchy – that authority is inherently flawed and has to self-justify all the time, and if it doesn't you have to dismantle it, according to Noam Chomsky. How can governments run like this? Rabbi Chanina Deputy High Priest says in Pirkei Avot that if we don't have respect and fear of authorities, people will swallow each other up.

Nowhere is this ideology and its destructive elements clearer than in this week's parasha with the first anarchist, none other than Korach himself. Korach says we don't need leaders or authority. But lawlessness, civil disobedience and defiance can destroy society, and that is what happened. Korach brought destruction on himself because of this overreaching and built on this destructive anarchist ideology.

So many societies are going to the extremes – some to the hard left and some to the hard right – and we must be very careful of these extremes. May we follow Moshe Rabbeinu's example to follow and respect authority, the rule of law, as only that way can life exist the way that it should.

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Parshas Korach**

**"Fake News" Is Not a Modern-Day Invention**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1342 – The Case of The Man Who Now Deines That He's a Kohain Good Shabbos!

Over the years, we have spoken about certain Gemaras very many times, always trying to find new insights. Ohn ben Peles of Shevet Reuven is initially enumerated as one of the main protagonists of the Korach rebellion. Later on, he is not mentioned. A famous Gemara (Sanhedrin 109b) says that his wife saved him.

How did she save him? She argued to him that it does not make any difference to him whether Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader. Either way, he is just a follower, with no power of his own. "You have nothing to gain from this dispute. You will always remain just an Indian and not a Chief." Ohn ben Peles conceded that his wife was right, but said that at that point he had no choice in the matter. He had already agreed to join the rebellion. Korach and his followers were on their way to pick him up to join the fight with Moshe.

The Gemara relates that Ohn's wife came up with a great plan: She got her husband drunk. He was sleeping. She sat herself in the front of the tent, removed her hair covering, messed up her hair, and basically "scared away" the "very frum" rabble-rousers who came to pick up her husband. They did not want to look at a woman whose hair was uncovered! They just left the tent, and that is how Ohn ben Peles was saved. About this incident, the Gemara cites the pasuk, "The wisdom of women saved the house…" (Mishlei 14:1).

The ba'alei mussar ask the following question:

Korach had a whole litany of complaints against Moshe Rabbeinu: Moshe practices nepotism. He gave his close family members all the important jobs. Look at the embarrassment he causes to the Leviim – he shaved them, leaving them bald from head to toe. Then he picked them up and shook them like a lulav. Then, Korach related, there was this poor widow with two daughters. Moshe forced her to leave leket, shikcha, and peah (gifts to the poor) from her crops, reducing her harvest yield. Then he made her give terumos and ma'asros (additional gifts to the Kohanim and Leviim from the harvested crops). The Kohanim took her first born animals. Then they took the zeroa, lechayayim, and keivah (the parts of slaughtered animals that are given to the Kohanim). After leaving her penniless, she and her two daughters died in famine.

Ohn ben Peles must have bought into this litany of complaints. He was one of the chief antagonists. So, the ba'alei mussar ask, how was his wife able to convince him to abandon his rebellion? Granted, he would never become the leader of the people. But how does that answer all the complaints against Moshe Rabbeinu? How does that answer the fact that Moshe practiced nepotism? That he embarrassed the Leviim? That he caused the poor woman and her daughters to die?

The answer is that the list of ostensible complaints is never the real issue. When people get into a machlokes, it is not about the laundry list of "It's not right! / It's not fair!" issues that the antagonists come up with. People get into machlokes for one reason – because of personalities! They get into arguments because they want money or they want kavod (honor) or they want power. That is always the fuel that feeds machlokes.

When Ohn's wife explained to him that he was not going to get any money or honor or power out of his participation in the Korach-Moshe contest, all the arguments and taynas against Moshe Rabbeinu became irrelevant. Who cares whether a garment that is entirely techeiles is obligated in tzitsis or whether a house filled with sefarim is obligated in mezuza or not? Those are academic discussions. What about the poor woman and her daughters? That story never happened. There was no planting in the midbar. There was no leket, shikcha, or peah. There was no zeroa, lechayayim, or keivah. It was all 'fake news.' Fake news did not start with Donald Trump. It went back to Korach. They made it up. There was no such thing. It all became irrelevant once Ohn ben Peles realized that there was nothing for him in joining the machlokes.

That is what the Gemara means when it cites the pasuk, "The wisdom of women saved the house." The great wisdom of the wife of Ohn ben Peles was that she could tap into that crucial point of showing her husband that he had nothing to gain from joining the rebellion. She didn't get into a polemic with him to convince him about a garment that was entirely techeiles. She said, "I know what this about – this is about kavod." So she told her husband: Listen here, you will not get an iota more of kavod, whether Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader. That was her chochma – to see the real reason behind the machlokes. That is the case with every machlokes, ninety percent or more of the time. No matter how it starts out (perhaps for the noblest of reasons), in the end, it devolves into an argument over kavod and power. One of the greatest forces in human nature is the urge to win.

Forget all the high-sounding arguments, "Kavod haTorah! Kavod Shem Shamayim!" In the end, the major motivation is "I need to win." In the end, it is "all about me." That was the wisdom of the wife of Ohn ben Peles.

The Real 'Anav' Is Not Haunted by 'What People Are Going to Say'

The pasuk says that Korach and his followers gathered around Moshe and proclaimed: "It is too much for you! Because the entire assembly – all of them – are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3). The Rebbe Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshische asks a powerful question: If I were to say, "Albert Einstein was a smart fellow, but he knew nothing about physics," that would be the stupidest thing that anyone could say. He was the greatest physicist of the twentieth century. He may not have known how to balance a checkbook but he sure knew physics. If I were to say "Warren Buffet is a bright guy, but he can't pick a stock to save his life" that too would be idiotic. Warren Buffet is the best stock picker in the world. Don't tell me he can't pick a stock!

So, what are they complaining about Moshe Rabbeinu? "Moshe Rabbeinu is a ba'al gayvah (haughty person)." If you want to say things about Moshe Rabbeinu, fine. But don't accuse him of haughtiness: "The man was very humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth." (Bamidbar 12:3). It was his most outstanding character trait. So how can anyone claim that Moshe Rabbeinu was a ba'al gayvah? What is the meaning of this?

The Sefas Emes says something very interesting: There are two types of humble people. There is a fellow who is an anav, who knows he is highly talented. He knows he is smarter and more talented than most people. He knows who he is, except that he makes a conscious effort to act with humility because he knows that it is not good to be a ba'al gayvah. He works on himself so that he acts like an anav and never acts in a haughty fashion. This person is definitely an anav because even though he feels inside that he is better than other people, outwardly he behaves like an anav. He is very careful to never, in any way, shape, or form, act in a way that can be misinterpreted by people, causing them to think that he is a ba'al gayvah.

However, there is another type of anav – the type of anav that Moshe Rabbeinu was. Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest anav on the face of the earth because he had the greatest relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. Any person who has that kind of relationship with the Ribono shel Olam truly feels that he is, in fact, nothing. It is not an act. That is, in essence, how he feels.

Such a person never needs to worry about "what are other people going to say." That does not motivate him. I act the way I act because I really feel like this! Since Moshe was this type of "essential anav," sometimes he did things that could be interpreted by people as being haughty. Moshe Rabbeinu had no problem talking with authority and absolute certainty because he was not worried that people would thereby view him as arrogant. When he had to assert himself, he asserted himself without worrying "what are people going to say?" If he had to give people mussar, he gave people mussar. He was genuine to the core.

That, says the Sefas Emes, is why people could say, "Moshe Rabbeinu is a ba'al gayvah." Sometimes he would act in a fashion that typical talented people would not act – just because they don't want to be considered a ba'al gayvah.

I would like to briefly share the following incident. It was apparently a cause célèbre that I did not know about. There was a fellow named Rav Moshe, son of Rav Pinchas m'Koretz. He had two sons who were in the printing business, in the city of Slavuta (Ukraine). They printed a Shas. Before printing the Shas, they wanted to make sure that their investment would be protected, so they went to all the Gedolim of Europe and got an agreement from them that for the next ten years, no one else would print a Shas. They figured that in ten years, they would be able to sell out their entire inventory of printed Shasim and could make a profit on their up-front expenses.

After five years, they sold out most of the Shasim. So, a fellow from Vilna – whose last name was Romm – said, "I want to print a Shas in Vilna". This was the "Vilna Shas." He went to the other printers and told them what he intended to do. They told him, "Wait a minute. We have an agreement from all the gedolim in Europe (including Rabbi Akiva Eiger) that no one is permitted to print a Shas for ten years, and it has only been five years." Mr. Romm told the original printers that they had already sold most of their Shasim, and that he was willing to buy up every single remaining copy that had not yet been sold.

The case went to a Din Torah: Was Mr. Romm permitted to print the Vilna Shas after five years, with the condition that he would buy up all the remaining sefarim from the original printers? Rabbi Akiva Eiger paskened that he was permitted to print the new Shas. However, the original printers were not going to take this sitting down. They went to other Rabbonim, who sided with them and ruled that Mr. Romm could not print his Shas for another five years.

These original printers started the following rumor: People should not rely on the "heter" of Rabbi Akiva Eiger to print the Vilna Shas because he is already elderly, and everything he says is really based on the will of his son, Rav Shlomo Eiger. Rabbi Eiger senior doesn't make his own decisions anymore. Therefore, you can discount what Rabbi Akiva Eiger says. He is not the same Rabbi Akiva Eiger as he was five years ago.

Without getting into the details, Rabbi Akiva Eiger was an extraordinarily humble person. The story is told that when he and Rav Yakov m'Leesa (the "Nesivos") were going to a certain town, there was a large reception at the train station of people who gathered to greet the two gedolei hador. Rabbi Akiva Eiger was sure that everyone was coming for the Nesivos and the Nesivos was sure that everyone was coming for Rabbi Akiva Eiger. That is the type of anav he was.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote on 4 Teves 5596 (December 25, 1835) "I am appalled by the chutzpah of these people and their words are blasphemous. Not only what they wrote about my son, the gaon Rav Shlomo Eiger, that he twists my heart, but also what they said about me, that I could be influenced to pasken against the din! All their correspondence to me (arguing on behalf of prohibiting the printing of the Vilna Shas) are devorim b'tailim (words that are null and void). I do not forgive them, for it is impossible to forgive shaming the Torah."

So, we see this great anav, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, could write such a letter with such force and such self-righteous conviction! I am sure there were people reading this letter who said "Rabbi Akiva Eiger must be a ba'al gayvah!" The answer is that Rabbi Akiva Eiger was the same type of anav as Moshe Rabbeinu – a real genuine anav. He was an anav b'etzem (humble to his essence). That type of humble individual is not afraid to shout "Hey! This is a chutzpah! This is a bizayon haTorah!" Let people say that Rabbi Akiva Eiger is a ba'al gayvah, because he knows that he is not a ba'al gayvah.

That is how people could come to the erroneous conclusion that Moshe Rabbeinu – the humblest man who ever walked the earth – was "exalting himself" over the Khal Hashem. When you are a real anav, you act and you do what is right and you are not haunted by "What are people going to say?"

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**Parshat Korach: Holiness Must Be Achieved**

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

"The entire congregation is holy." (Numbers 16:3)

Korach stages a rebellion against Moses; hence he is the adversary and antithesis to Moses, pictured by the subsequent sages and commentaries as the personification of a unique evil in the world. But unlike the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Korach stands tall not only with two legs, but with a powerful and convincing argument as well: a position which echoes throughout history.

Korach says to Moses and Aaron, "You have gone too far. The entire congregation is holy, and has God in their midst. Why are you setting yourselves above God's congregation?" (Numbers 16:3). After all, on the surface his argument appears to be both logical and just.

Indeed, did not Moses himself command the nation, "You shall become holy" (Leviticus 19:2)? And the Korach Defense Committee would maintain that if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity; affirmative action must become the order of the day. 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!

True, 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 task-masters, undoubtedly God would be speaking 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 ways of looking at the world, two different philosophies of life. When Moses brought down the Torah on Sinai, God did not declare everyone to be holy; after all, He created a world in which Cain had killed Abel and Pharaoh had enslaved an entire nation. What God did do was to place into the world the possibility of achieving holiness. "You shall become holy," he commanded – in future tense, in potential, and only by means of arduous commitment to a lifestyle of 613 commandments.

"All families of the earth shall be blessed by you" – but only if you live by My word and become a light unto the nations! "The formation of the heart of humanity is evil from its inception" – but since humanity is also created in the image of God, the evil can be overcome and holiness can reign supreme. However, this depends on how you live and how you act. "I have set before you this day life and death, good and evil. Choose life." Your deeds become the cardinal factor determining whether or not you've achieved holiness; meritocracy, not affirmative action, rules the day!

Now when Korach argued that everyone was holy, that he too could have achieved what Moses achieved had he only had the proper opportunity, was he defending holiness or uprooting holiness? After all, if everyone and everything is holy, then the word "holy" loses its meaning. By arguing for holiness in the way that he did – holiness now – Korach was really arguing against holiness. We need not work for it, or strive to achieve it. We already are!

And perhaps this is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses on the commandments of tzitzit (ritual fringes) and mezuza, the two commandments dealing with the most basic human needs and expressions: clothing and shelter. 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 mezuza (which has only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moses replied in the affirmative, Korach laughed at the lack of logic in Moses' teaching!

But Korach missed the point. Moses was teaching 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 mezuza at the front door, and even a garment which is wholly tekhelet still requires ritual

fringes. Never be complacent, always remain on guard and strive to add another dose of sanctity.

The twentieth century had more than its share of "we are holy" philosophies, letting it all hang out, sanctifying every instinct and thought. It doesn't matter if it was Norman O. Brown or Herbert Marcuse of the Living Theater, the rage in the Western world has been to free the id from the prison of the superego, and if the id is holy, then everything must be holy. But behind such views of an "anything-goes" holiness, nothing goes. If everything is special, nothing is special.

Fundamentally, Korach was saying that "as is" is holy – because nothing can change, grow, or develop. And that is the meaning of Korach's name. The Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean bald – and no hair grows on a bald head – or ice, and no vegetation developed during the Ice Age.

"As is his name, so is he." Korach rejected the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he was cynically scornful of one's ability to grow and develop and change and inspire.

But Moses' (and God's) approach is different. When Moses announced to the rebels the means by which God would determine who was holy to Him, he had Korach and his men bring fire in the fire pans and offer incense. Fire symbolizes the possibility of change, but only after a specific process takes place: by means of heat, the hardest materials can be made to bend and melt, can be transformed from solid to liquid and to many states in between. Incense changes the environment; its sweet-smelling fragrance can remove the rancid odor of death and decay, can transform the slaughtered carcasses of the animal sacrifices into an experience of commitment to God which can perfect – and perfume – the world. Moses' vision was one of optimistic faith, the rising flames which bring out the fragrance of the incense and soar heavenward to the divine. Material objects, humanity, the very world can be changed, elevated, sanctified – but it depends on merit, on commitment, on achievement!

Korach's punishment and death fit his crime and philosophy. Korach and his cohorts were swallowed alive by the earth. From the perspective of the earth and the grave, all who enter its bowels are equal. The earth makes no distinctions, remains oblivious to titles or accomplishments. The earth is the ultimate "equal-opportunity employer." After one is buried underground, there is no longer any possibility of change or growth.

The parsha's final proof that Aaron was the one chosen by God – and the symbolism which serves as the crowning proof of our thesis – involves the command to write the names of each of the tribes' leaders on twelve staffs, to be placed in the Tent of Communion before the Ark of Testimony. The next day Aaron's staff, representing the house of Levi, had blossomed, giving forth leaves and almonds, as if it were a tree. And a tree is the most basic symbol of that which grows and develops. After this, God said to Moses that no one should ever again deny the authority of Aaron's priesthood.

Shabbat Shalom

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**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

**The Leader as Servant**

**Korach**

"You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Num. 16:3

So said Korach to Moses. And Korach had a point. At the heart of his challenge is the idea of equality. That surely is a Jewish idea. Was not Thomas Jefferson at his most biblical when he wrote, in the Declaration of Independence, that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"?

Of course, Korach does not mean what he says. He claims to be opposed to the very institution of leadership, and at the same time he wants to be the leader. "All are equal, but some are more equal than others" is the seventh command in George Orwell's Animal Farm, his critique of Stalinist Russia. But what if Korach had meant it? If he had been sincere? There is, on the face of it, compelling logic to what he says. Did God not call on Israel to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," meaning a kingdom each of whose members is a priest, a nation all of whose citizens are holy? Why then should there be a cadre of priests and one High Priest? Did not the military hero Gideon say, in the era of the Judges, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:23)? Why then should there be a single, life-appointed Moses-type leader rather than what happened in the days of the Judges, namely charismatic figures who led the people through a particular crisis and then went back to their previous anonymity, as Caleb and Pinchas did during the lifetime of Moses?

And to Gideon's point, surely the people needed no other leader than God Himself. Samuel warns the people of the dangers of appointing a king:

"He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots ... He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves ... When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

I Sam. 8:11-18

This is the biblical anticipation of Lord Acton's famous remark that all power tends to corrupt. Why then give individuals the power Moses and Aaron in their different ways seemed to have?

The Midrash Tanhuma, quoted by Rashi, contains a brilliant commentary on Korach's claim. It says that Korach gathered his co-conspirators and issued Moses a challenge in the form of a halachic question:

He dressed them with cloaks made entirely of blue wool. They came and stood before Moses and asked him, "Does a cloak made entirely of blue wool require fringes [tzitzit], or is it exempt?" He replied, "It does require [fringes]." They began laughing at him [saying], "Is it possible that a cloak of another [coloured] material, one string of blue wool exempts it [from the obligation of techelet], and this one, which is made entirely of blue wool, should not exempt itself?"

Tanhuma, Korach 4; Rashi to Num. 16:1

What makes this commentary brilliant is that it does two things. First it establishes a connection between the episode of Korach and the immediately preceding passage, the law of tzitzit at the end of last week's Parsha. That is the superficial point. The deep one is that the Midrash deftly shows how Korach challenged the basis of Moses' and Aaron's leadership. The Israelites were "all holy; and God is among them." They were like a robe, every thread of which is royal blue. And just as a blue robe does not need an additional fringe to make it bluer still, so a holy people does not need extra holy people like Moses and Aaron to make it holier still. The idea of a leadership hierarchy in "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" is a contradiction in terms. Everyone is like a priest. Everyone is holy. Everyone is equal in dignity before God. Hierarchy has no place in such a nation.

What then did Korach get wrong? The answer is contained in the second half of his challenge: "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Korach's mistake was to see leadership in terms of status. A leader is one higher than the rest: the alpha male, the top dog, the controller, director, dominator, the one before whom people prostrate themselves, the ruler, the commander, the superior, the one to whom others defer. That is what leaders are in hierarchical societies. That is what Korach implied by saying that Aaron and Moses were "setting themselves above" the people.

But that is not what leadership is in the Torah, and we have had many hints of it already. Of Moses it says:

"He was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."

Num. 12:3

Of Aaron and the priests, in their capacity as those who blessed the people, it says:

"So they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Num. 6:27

In other words, the priests were mere vehicles through which the Divine force flowed. Neither priest nor prophet had personal power or authority.

They were transmitters of a word not their own. The prophet spoke the Word of God for this time. The priest spoke the Word of God for all time. But neither was author of the Word. That is why humility was not an accident of their personalities but of the essence of their role.

Even the slightest hint that they were exercising their own authority, speaking their own word or doing their own deed, immediately invalidated them. That, in fact, is what sealed the fate of Nadav and Avihu, and of Moses and Aaron later, when the people complained and they said, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10)

There are many interpretations of what went wrong on that occasion but one, undeniably, is that they attributed the action to themselves rather than God (see Hizkuni ad loc.).

Even a king in Jewish law – the office that comes closest to status – is commanded to be humble. He is to carry a Torah scroll with him and 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" (See Deut. 17:19-20 and Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 2:6)

In Judaism leadership is not a matter of status but of function. A leader is not one who holds himself higher than those he or she leads. That, in Judaism, is a moral failing not a mark of stature. The absence of hierarchy does not mean the absence of leadership. An orchestra still needs a conductor. A play still needs a director. A team still needs a captain.

A leader need not be a better instrumentalist, actor, or player than those he leads. His role is different. He must co-ordinate, give structure and shape to the enterprise, make sure that everyone is following the same script, travelling in the same direction, acting as an ensemble rather than a group of prima donnas. He must have a vision and communicate it. At times he must impose discipline. Without leadership even the most glittering array of talents produces, not music but noise. That is not unknown in Jewish life, then and now.

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Judges 17:6, Judges 21:25

That is what happens when there is no leadership.

The Torah, and Tanach as a whole, has a marvellous, memorable way of putting this. Moses' highest honour is that he is called eved Hashem, "the servant of God." He is called this once on his death (Deut. 34:5), and no less than eighteen times in Tanach as a whole. The only other person given this title is Joshua, twice. In Judaism, a leader is a servant and to lead is to serve. Anything else is not leadership as Judaism understands it.

Note that we are all God's servants. The Torah says so:

"To Me the Israelites are servants; they are My servants whom I brought out of Egypt."

Lev. 25:55

So it is not that Moses was a different kind of being than we are all called on to be. It is that he epitomised it to the utmost degree. The less there is of 'self' in one who serves God, the more there is of God. Moses was the supreme exemplar of Rabbi Johanan's principle, that "Where you find humility, there you find greatness."

It is one of the sadder features of Judaism that we tend to forget that many of the great ideas appropriated by others are in fact ours. So it is with Servant Leadership, the phrase and theory associated with Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990). Greenleaf himself derived it from a novel by Hermann Hesse with Buddhist undertones, and in fact the Jewish concept is different from his. Greenleaf held that the leader is the servant of those he leads. In Judaism a leader is the servant of God, not of the people; but neither is he their master. Only God is that. Nor is he above them: he and they are equal. He is simply their teacher, guide, advocate and defender. His task is to remind them endlessly of their vocation and inspire them to be true to it.

In Judaism, leadership is not about popularity:

"If a scholar is loved by the people of his town, it is not because he is gifted but because he fails to rebuke them in matters of heaven."

Ketubot 105b

Nor is a true leader eager for the job. Almost without exception the great leaders of Tanach were reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership. Rabban Gamliel summed it up when he said to two Sages he wanted to appoint to office:

"Do you imagine I am offering you rulership? I am offering you avdut, the chance to serve."

Horayot 10a-b

That, then, was Korach's mistake. He thought leaders were those who set themselves above the congregation. He was right to say that this type of ruler has no place in Judaism. We are all called on to be God's servants. Leadership is not about status but function. Without tzitzit, a blue robe is just a robe, not a holy garment. Without leadership, the Jewish people is just a people, an ethnic group, not a holy nation. And without reminders that we are a holy nation, who then will we become, and why?

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**The lion has risen**

**Israel did not ask "whether" but "how." And with reliance on G-d's help, that question was answered by its brave fighters, with President Trump giving the final hammer blows. Reading parashat Shlach, we can see that this is what the spies did not do. [last week's] Rabbi YY Jacobson**

It feels like the Jewish people are now repairing the great error and tragedy of the spies, explored in this week's Torah on Thursday, June 12, 2025, 16 Sivan, 5785, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He placed a prayer note in the Wall, on which he had scribbled a single line, a quote from the Torah: "Behold, a people rises like a lioness, and stands up like a lion."

Hours later, the world understood the significance of that verse. Israel launched a surprise attack on Iran, named Operation Rising Lion.

As Rabbi Aron Moss (Sydney, Australia) wrote eloquently, there couldn't be a more fitting name.

Our sages note that the lion's shape is unique: broad in the front, narrow at the back. "This symbolizes the Jewish people. Our strength is forward-facing. We lead, not follow. We don't look back, but look ahead to a better world, and do what we can to bring it about."

Israel launched a preemptive strike . Like a lion, we are on the front foot. Rather than wait to be attacked, Israel struck first, in keeping with the Talmudic rule: "When someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill them first."

History has taught us to take that rule seriously. When Israel hesitates or ignores clear threats, the consequences are devastating, like the Yom Kippur War and October 7. But when Israel acts decisively to prevent our enemies' plans, we see victory, like the Six-Day War, and the dazzling achievements we are seeing now.

Israel understood that the question is not if we will strike, only when and how. The threat of Iran was so real and lethal, that the Jewish nation grasped we must rise like lions and act.

If We Win?

It's an old anecdote. Years ago, the Israeli parliament, or Knesset, convened an emergency session to figure out a solution for the Israeli economy.

One brilliant minister said, "Let's declare war on the U.S., and then, in the wake of the utter destruction America will bring upon us, we will receive billions of dollars for reconstruction, like Germany and Japan."

"Sounds great," responded another member of the Knesset. "One problem: What will we do if we win the war?"

Twelve Jews on a Mission

This week's portion, Shlach, tells the story of 12 men who were dispatched by Moses from the desert to go and survey the Land of Canaan and its inhabitants. The purpose of their journey was to prepare the Jewish people for the subsequent conquest and settlement of the Land.[1]

Upon discharging the spies on their mission, Moses presented them with a list of questions they needed to answer. "See the Land," Moses said to them. "How is it? And the nations that dwell in it—are they strong or

weak? Are they few or numerous? And how is the land in which they dwell—is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they dwell—are they open or are they fortified?"

When the twelve spies returned from their 40-day tour of Israel they presented to the people a report of their findings.

"We arrived at the Land to which you sent us," the spies said, "and indeed it flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. But the people that dwell in the land are powerful, the cities are greatly fortified and we also saw the offspring of the giants. We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us," they proclaimed.

The report demoralized the Jewish nation and drained it of the motivation to enter the Land. As a result, the spies died, and much of the generation died in the desert, never making it into the Promised Land. Only 39 years later, in the year 1276 B.C.E., did the children and grandchildren of this generation cross the borders and settle in the Promised Land.

Kill the Messenger?

One of the many questions raised by biblical commentators [2] concerns the reason for the spies being condemned to punishment. Moses gave them a detailed list of questions about the Land; he instructed them to make their own observations as to what will await the people upon their arrival.

This is exactly what the spies did. They came back with an answer to all of Moses' questions and reported what they perceived to be the reality. If Moses expected them to cover up their observations -- that the Land was inhabited by mighty men and its cities were greatly fortified -- he should have never sent them in the first place!

Why were the men faulted for relating what they had seen? Is this not a case of "kill the messenger?"

Introducing Paralysis

The answer is that if the spies had merely related to Moses and to the people the reality of the situation as they saw it, everything would have been fine. But they did more than that. They used the difficulties they observed as an excuse to capitulate in the face of fear.

Had the spies returned and said, "Hey guys, we have seen a mighty people and well-protected cities in the Land, so now we need to devise an effective strategy of how to go about our challenging mission," they would have fulfilled their task flawlessly. The moment they responded to the obstacles by saying "We cannot do it anymore," they swayed an entire people to abandon their G-d-given destiny.

The spies are condemned for substituting the legitimate and important question "How will we do it?" with the despairing and helpless conclusion, "We can never do it!"

Conquering Your Darkness

Each of us has a domain in our life that needs to be conquered, a terrain that needs to be transformed into a "holy land." Some of us need to confront fear, numbness, insecurity, temptation, guilt, self-loathing, or shame. We must confront challenges within our psyches, our marriages, and our families. Since the challenges that lay in recovery's path are at times frightening, we are naturally tempted to believe that we are incapable of overcoming our darkness and we surrender to the obstacles.

The feeling is understandable, but if you surrender to it, it will rob you of the opportunity to liberate your life and arrive at your personal "Promised Land." The option of resignation compels you to remain stuck in a barren desert made up of the stuff of shame and despair.

The question ought not to be, "Can I do it?" Because that's the question coming from my inner sense of incompetence. G-d conceived you in love, and the day you were born is the day He declared that the world is incomplete without you.

As the saying goes, sometimes when you find yourself in a dark place you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted. The resources to repair the "hole in our personal roof" are present. I am empowered to leave my wilderness and discover my light, joy, and wholeness. G-d has sent me into each of my life's journeys with the power to bring light into my darkness and discover my own inner infinity, as a Divine ambassador of love, light, healing, and hope.

The story of the spies is our personal story. My trauma tells me, "I can't," and I have all the emotional evidence and data to support my conclusions. But with lots of empathy and faith in my inner Divine self, I can discover a deeper untarnished, unfearful core that has the power to say: I can, and I will; now let me figure out how.

I want to dance to the beat of creativity and connection, not despair to the beat of survival and loneliness.

"The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer," General Montgomery once remarked.

Ask not "whether," but rather "how."[3]

That is what Israel did now in Iran, and we are seeing extraordinary Divine miracles, despite the horrific loses. America has joined to destroy the nuclear threat Iran posed. May Israel not stop till full victory is achieved.

[1]Numbers chapters 13-14.

[2] Nachmanides in his commentary on the opening verses of the portion.

[3] This essay is based on an address I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Shlach, 21 Sivan, 5749 (June 24, 1989), published in Sefer Hasichos 5749 vol. 2. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 13 pp. 39-41. For other answers to the above question, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Shlach 1, and many references that are noted there.

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**Drasha**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Korach

Grinding the Point

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

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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**Perceptions**

**By Rabbi Pinchas Winston**

Parshas Korach

The Arrogance of it All

THE NAME ALONE makes me uncomfortable. It's not just what Korach did, because there have been many rebellions against the Torah leadership throughout the ages. It is also about who he was and what he became.

A hot topic is the Erev Rav, the Mixed Multitude. They're the fire-starters in the Chumash ever since Moshe Rabbeinu took them out of Egypt with the Jewish People. There's not really much positive to say about them, and anyone since who has made life difficult for the Jewish nation has often been labeled with their name.

But the truth is, we're pretty good at producing our own worst enemies. Last week's parsha previewed that, and this week's parsha is its follow-up. The Gemora says that one of the most arrogant groups of people are Jews who do not learn Torah. These parshios make it clear that not learning is not a prerequisite. We have been shown that a person can be a talmid chacham and still fit the bill, sometimes because of what they know.

The Gemora also explains that arrogant people on the scale of Korach and the spies don't come out of nowhere. One of the main sources of their souls are the 974 Generations that existed (briefly) prior to Creation. The Leshem explains that these "beings" were not humans and they did not live in a world anything like ours. Contrary to what many have mistakenly thought, these 974 generations were not an earlier version of our Creation. They were just a spiritual mechanism to actualize the reality of evil so we could have free will in our world.

Does any of this really make a difference? Perhaps it does between God and the Korachs of history when it comes to passing judgment on their level of culpability. But down here, the damage is the damage no matter what the reason for it. If someone is injured because someone accidentally pulled a trigger, they bleed the same way. And "Just following orders" does not usually get a person off the moral hook.

Is it a coincidence then that his name was Korach, which is similar to the word kerach—ice? It was a testament to the kind of person he was, that he had a frigid personality, the kind that results when a person is arrogant. Like a person over-exposed to the cold, his spiritual circulation stopped and he spiritually gangrened, a lot like the left in this country and the leadership of Iran.

Iran is getting pummeled. And they will get even more pummeled in the days to come because their arrogance, which got them into this trouble in the first place, is so out of control. America has now joined the war. Logic dictates that Iran step down and lick their wounds. It also dictates that Hamas give back the remaining hostages and get out of the war as soon as they can. Arrogance dictates a do-or-die strategy.

Similarly, the left in this country is taking steps to get their way at great risk to the security of the country. Nothing to do with truth or falsehood, right or wrong…just use their power and position to get the man in their way out of it. Its leaders have been caught being hypocritical, but they don't feel the need to defend themselves because it is not about being moral, only about being in power.

And last week's parsha and this week's as well remind us that this is not a new problem, but that it has been a thorn in God's side, so-to-speak, for millennia now…on that He seems to have put there Himself…for our good…somehow. Yes, it makes bad worse, but it also makes good, better. As Chazal say, when Malchus Edom (Western society today) claims to be kosher when it is really treif, Moshiach will finally come. When the world turns upside down and right becomes wrong and vice versa, get your Shabbos best ready so it will be ready to greet him.

That's why the final war, the GR"A said, is against the Erev Rav and is the worst of all. He says that you either fight against them or are on their side, even if you think you are neutral. It's easy to fight a self-professed enemy who does nothing to hide it, like Hamas and Iran. It is far trickier to defend yourself against an enemy who claims to be on your side while stabbing you in the back. It just confuses too many people into thinking the wrong way and doing the wrong thing.

The spies got straightened out in the same parsha last week, as did Korach and his assembly. It was also perfectly clear who did it, even though many still challenged Moshe Rabbeinu after the earth closed its mouth once again. What arrogance won't make people do!

I can't speak for everyone, but I think most of us can agree that we have witnessed how we ourselves have stood up for things we have said or done already knowing that we were wrong. We should have admitted our mistakes and perhaps even apologized, but something inside of us just wouldn't let us…hoping that somehow we could save face, all the while destroying more of it. I have personally been awed by just how far people will go to protect themselves, and at what cost. And from hereon in, it will be our ability to humble ourselves before the truth that may actually save our lives, and our portion in the World to Come. It's war

alright, but it is also a test of character to see who we really are and what we really believe.
Good Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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**Since Parshas Korach deals with avoiding machlokes, I am sharing questions and answers that deal with this topic...**
**Rabbi Kaganoff**
Question:
My husband keeps shooting himself in the leg at every job he gets. He comes in late, leaves exactly on time no matter how hectic things are in the office, and generally seems lazy when it comes to his jobs. Then he's surprised when he's the first to get laid off. He was recently fired from yet another job. Is there any way I can motivate him to change, or point out what's going on, without destroying his fragile ego?
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:
Anything you try to do to change your husband will just lead to more frustration and cause shalom bayis difficulties. He undoubtedly knows the problem, but a person will only change if and when he wants to. Your nudging him will not motivate him. You are probably doing a reasonable amount of nudging without even realizing it and we can assume it's taking its toll.
The one thing you can do is try to build your husband up with positive motivation and compliments. Help him feel better about himself. Find excuses to compliment him in a sincere way, specifically on the rare occasion when he shows initiative.
Although when he is unemployed one cannot compliment him for his bringing home income, I often find it surprising that women expect their husbands to compliment them for preparing supper, but a woman does not find it necessary to thank her husband for going to work. One cannot emphasize more how much it does for a man's ego to be complimented for earning a living and going to work, particularly when it is a struggle for him to do so.
Question:
I'm almost twenty-one years old but have not yet started dating since I have an older sister who is still in shidduchim. My parents want me to start dating already, but I don't want to. My sister also says I shouldn't wait for her, but I disagree. I can't picture myself as a kalla, getting married before her. I don't want that to happen! And once I start dating it may happen. What should I do?
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:
I believe you should start dating. The bottom line is that, while it's wonderful to care for your sister's feelings, it is not easy for a girl to find a shidduch in today's world, and there's no need to make it any more difficult for yourself.
The harsh reality is that your sister is not yet married, but that's no reason to prevent you from getting married. This is particularly the case when no one else in your family seems to mind; in fact, they are encouraging you to date. It's misplaced to worry so much about your sister's feelings that you put your own future in jeopardy.
However, I must point out that if you are very resistant to the idea of dating, it may make the process quite difficult. If you find that you continue to struggle with feelings of ambivalence and guilt, it would be best to seek out a rebbetzin, therapist, or life coach who can help you work through these feeling.
May you and your sister both find your zivugim b'karov.

Question:
I work in a large marketing company where nearly all the employees are frum. The staff meets once a week to discuss ideas and proposals. Once a month, that meeting includes the CEO, and all ideas are finalized. Numerous times, my immediate supervisor has presented my ideas as her own. This is very detrimental to me because the possibility of a promotion is to a certain extent based on the proposal of original ideas. Her stealing my ideas is hampering my growth in the company. It's difficult for me to say anything to my supervisor because I will be risking her wrath, and she is the darling of the CEO precisely because he thinks she is very creative. When I once broached the subject, she said I was imagining things and that the ideas were really hers. What can I do?
R' Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:
The specific situation you are presenting is a bit unusual, because it is uncommon for a frum person who is psychologically healthy to say an outright lie to a listener who knows he is lying. Thus, there is either a major misunderstanding, something difficult to explain when this has happened repeatedly, or, more likely, one of the two parties suffers from a psychological handicap. Since we do not know which party is having this difficulty, it is hard for me to advise you.
Assuming, however, that you are indeed the party being wronged here, and you've repeatedly discerned this type of unhealthy behavior in your immediate superior, you have an obligation to report this to the "big boss." The reason here is simple: Halacha requires us to protect someone else's money, and having either an unstable or dishonest employee could cause your boss long-term financial harm.
You should make a discreet appointment with the big boss and explain only what you have observed, without any added interpretation or exaggeration. It is a good idea to review the relevant parts of Sefer Chofetz Chaim before the meeting and think through carefully exactly what you may say and how you will say it. Make it clear to the big boss that you are only meetin because of concern for his interests. Indeed, it is strictly prohibited to talk to him because you are angry at your immediate supervisor and want to get even.
Question:
My mother-in-law and I have an excellent, warm relationship. However, there is one area of conflict, which, although it doesn't damage the quality of our relationship, causes her anxiety and me irritation. The issue is chasunah attendance. My mother-in-law's father is one of many siblings, and they are currently marrying off their grandchildren. I see no need to kill my precious nights - work time (I work at home), housework, and much needed sleep - to attend a stranger's chasunah just because they are my mother-in-law's uncle's grandchild. To satisfy my mother-in-law's feelings, and to show that I'm not rebelling against her family's norms (as she claims I am), I go 2-3 times a year to a chassunah when it works out for me. When I do attend, I don't know most people there, and don't feel my presence appreciated enough for me to have killed a night. My mother-in-law feels that my attitude is wrong. She says if I would go to the chasunahs I would develop a relationship with her cousins and my second cousins, and they wouldn't be strangers. I feel that I don't have the emotional resources to have a relationship with so many people, to the extent that I'd attend their simchos. My mother-in-law agreed that I present this issue to you. Please advise.
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:
You seem to be asking whether you are obligated to acquiesce to your mother-in-law's request. In response, I'd like to start by briefly reviewing the halachos of kibud av va'em. You do have an obligation of kibud av v'em towards your husband's parents, although not on the same level as your obligation towards your own parents or your husband.
However, the mitzvah includes only two components – kibud and moreh. Kibud encompasses ensuring that your in-laws have their physical needs met. This involves providing them with food if needed, bringing them a drink if requested, taking care of their medical needs if relevant, and so on. Moreh requires you to show them respect by not contradicting them, not sitting in their set places, etc.
In the situation you describe, I don't see how either kibud or moreh comes into play. One can claim that since your mother-in-law is insisting so strongly on this, there's an element of moreh. However, that is only a result of her feeling so strongly that she insists on it, to the extent that your refusal is rude. Her position, even under these circumstances, is by no means obvious.
If you are like most frum women today, between caring for a large household, supplementing the family income, and taking care of all your other responsibilities, you are juggling the equivalent of two full-time jobs. It seems unfair for your mother-in-law to pile even more on your already overburdened shoulders. Women today are already far too

stressed, and need to spend more, not less, time with their families. Encroaching on that time for the sake of fairly distant relatives is not a wise move.
I don't know where you live. If you live in a city where it's acceptable to merely show up, say mazel tov, and leave, and if your mother-in-law would be happy with that arrangement, perhaps you could do that on occasion. But I wouldn't advocate any more than that.

Question:
I'm a sheitel macher, and recently opened up my own business. There's a problem I keep running into - relatives and good friends often assume that I will either do their sheitels entirely for free, or give them a steep discount. In addition, they often expect priority, and that I should do their sheitels before others that came earlier. I'm trying hard to establish myself, and my prices are already on the low end. Every discount impacts my parnassah. And when I push one job before another, it can hurt my reputation with the woman who now has to wait longer. I've tried to explain all this, but from the cool responses I've received, I realize that friends and relatives perceive me as mercenary and callous. What can I do?
R' Kaganoff:
As a rav, I'm going to approach this question from a halachic perspective, and leave the emotional issues involved to the other respondents.
It looks like your family members are unaware of the difficult predicament in which they are putting you. Their approach to utilizing your services is misguided. Just as we are told in hilchos tzedakah that relatives take precedence over someone not related, so, too, assuming that the quality of work is identical, we should bring our business to a relative before someone else. This is not for our personal benefit so that we can get a price break; it's so we can perform the highest level of tzedaka – that of helping someone become self-sufficient.
It seems like your friends and relatives are acting in self-interest, not halachic interest. They are probably not aware that their actions can sabotage your nascent business. You're trying to be responsible, build a client base, and earn a good reputation; giving their sheitels priority over those that came in earlier jeopardizes all that. In addition, as you may know, businesses that fail usually do so early. This is a critical period for you and cutting into your profits at this time is not wise.
I'm not saying that it's wrong to give a break to a friend or a relative – but that's a gesture you can only offer once you've established yourself and are on secure financial footing. Your primary responsibility is to your immediate family, and supporting them has to be your first objective. Iy"H, once you are well-established you can certainly offer your family and friends discounts, but it will be because you can afford to and wish to, not because you feel pressured to do so.
Until then, it may help to discuss the issue with your local rav. Assuming that he also feels that giving discounts is incorrect at this time, you can then tell your friends and relatives that you were given a psak not to give discounts until your business is established. This will hopefully deflect the negative feedback you've been receiving and will perhaps prompt your relatives and friends to examine their actions through the eye of halacha.
Question:
We are a young married couple with one child and living in Eretz Yisrael. Both of our parents live in the States but about a 3-4 hour drive apart. As Pesach approaches and we made our plans to visit the US, it became clear that only one set of parents was willing to pay towards our tickets to come home. After taking this into account, we decided that we still wanted to go and would pay the other half ourselves. However, when deciding where to be over Yom Tov we are expected to split it evenly, although we feel that we should only be going to the family that paid for us to come, or at least spend most of the time with them. Please help.
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:
There are no obvious halachic guidelines for such an issue; it falls into the category of the "fifth Shulchan Aruch." I'm therefore offering you my personal thoughts and judgment. One family is paying for half of your tickets; the other side is not contributing. It does seem fair that you should spend some more time with the side that is putting up money. However, there are mitigating factors that must be kept in mind:
Firstly, I'm assuming that the side that isn't paying is not doing so because they are stingy but rather because they simply don't have the resources. This brings up an important question: Should a family be penalized for not having the financial wherewithal that another family has been blessed with?
Secondly, if one side has more resources than the other side, it's probable that they come to visit in Eretz Yisrael on occasion, while the financially-strapped family probably comes rarely, if at all. This means that if you don't go visit them, you may never see them.
These factors indicate that you and your spouse need to sit down and have an open, honest conversation about the issue and reach a decision together. Although such discussions are not easy, realize that the making of a strong marriage comes through discussing sticky situations and working out issues.
Try to depersonalize the discussion and really focus on the points that the other person is making. Sometimes, it's helpful for each of you to "plead" the other side. Let the spouse whose parents are paying enumerate why the Yom Tov should be split, and let the one whose parents aren't able to chip in list the reasons the lion's share should be spent by the parents who are paying. Doing this will help you get out of your own headspace and see another perspective. Keep speaking until you reach a decision that you're both comfortable with. I wish you much hatzlacha.

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**Rav Kook Torah**
**Korach: Holiness in the Midst of the Community**
Judaism has an unusual concept called a minyan — a prayer quorum. Special prayers sanctifying God's name, such as the Kedushah and Kaddish prayers, may only be recited in the presence of ten adult Jewish men. An individual may pray alone, but without a minyan, certain parts of the liturgy must be omitted.
Where does this requirement come from?
The Talmud derives it 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 concluded 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 rooted in 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 heart of an elevated service of God is when we fulfill His will by helping and uplifting society. Therefore, the Kedushah prayer may not be recited 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 the community is reflected in 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 prayer quorum is ten.

Learning from Villains

But why do we learn this lesson from the wicked?

It is precisely the judgment of the wicked that sheds light on the reward of the righteous.

If the only result of wrongdoing 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. The wicked have a negative influence on the entire community, and it is for this reason that they are punished so severely.

This also illuminates the opposite: the power of the righteous. Just as the wicked are judged not only for their own actions but for the harm they bring to the community, so, too, the righteous are rewarded primarily for the good they bring into the lives of others.

Now it becomes clear that true holiness is in the context of the organic whole. Thus the Kedushah prayer, sanctifying God's Name, requires a minyan, a representative community of ten souls.

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**The Triumph of Israel and the Spirit of the Jewish People**
**By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

Israelis, Jews, and decent people around the world breathed a great sigh of relief and were filled with euphoria at the news that the spectacular American military, at the courageous order of President Donald Trump, had bombed and obliterated Iran's nuclear program. As of now, the 12-day war with Iran has reached a ceasefire with a stunning Israeli military victory, one that experts already say surpasses the Six Day war. We would all be remiss if we didn't follow the example of President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu, who both publicly and proudly thanked God for the success of their efforts.

It is truly extraordinary that for nearly fifty years, an evil regime, the world's largest state sponsor of terror, has wreaked havoc, murdering innocent Americans and Israelis while threatening its Arab neighbors. The danger and threat to the world of a nuclear Iran has been articulated by the last five American presidents and by countless world leaders.

History will show that President Trump and the United States didn't just talk about eliminating that threat, they acted. But the US, the world's greatest superpower, didn't do it alone, they had the help of only one other country. If you looked only at a comparison of countries by populations, land mass, economy, how long they have existed, their role among nations, would you ever guess that the other country that not only assisted but paved the way and set the stage was smaller than New Jersey, is only 77 years old and has a total population of just 10 million?

I got goosebumps when President Trump thanked Israel: "I want to thank and congratulate Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu. We worked as a team like perhaps no team has ever worked before, and we've gone a long way to erasing this horrible threat to Israel. I want to thank the Israeli military for the wonderful job they've done."

The role and contribution of the State of Israel in protecting the world and keeping it safe is nothing short of a Kiddush Hashem, a fulfillment of the Jewish people's mission in the world.

I was sitting at a beautiful Chuppah on Sunday, thinking about and reflecting on this achievement. The seventh beracha was recited and the Chuppah was about to conclude but instead of turning to the singing of Im Eshkacheich, we were all invited to rise as something else was sung first, the Mi'Shebeirach for Tzahal, the prayer for the IDF. I have attended dozens of weddings since October 7, and at every one of them, a prayer for our brothers and sisters in Israel and for the heroic and courageous members of the IDF was included, sometimes as the IDF prayer and other times as Tehillim.

As we all stood and focused on the heartfelt Tefillah, a thought occurred to me. In America's wars, in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, was any wedding of the average American interrupted to include a prayer for the American military? Were the weddings of any Americans paused to pray for American troops? Unless an immediate family member of the bride or groom was serving in active duty, I can't imagine a prayer was included, even right here in America. And yet, for the last year and three quarters, around the world, thousands of miles from Israel, Jews everywhere have refused to celebrate without also pausing to pray for the IDF. The Jewish people are unique in this way. Wherever we are around the world, we feel connected, and our wellbeing is intertwined.

In several places (Yevamos 61a, Bava Metzia 114b, Kerisus 6b), the Gemara says, "You, the Jewish people are called אדם, Odom, but the nations of the world are not called Odom." Read simply, it sounds like a terribly prejudiced and biased statement.

Rav Frand shares a story that offers a deeper understanding: In 1912, in Russia, Mendel Beilus was accused of killing a Christian child and using his blood to bake Matzahs. This slander or variations of it were unfortunately prevalent in Europe for many, many years. They were known as blood libels. Beilus' lawyer was afraid that to buttress their case, the accusers would make the argument that Jews considered non-Jews less than human. He was in fact afraid that they would cite the above-quoted Talmudic reference to prove this very point.

The lawyer therefore visited the Chortkever Rebbe and asked him how he could respond if the opposing lawyers would throw that Gemara at him. The Rebbe said as follows: If an Italian was seized and put on trial, we would not witness a scenario where all Italians were congregating in their churches to pray for this one Italian. The same can be said about the French for a Frenchman, and so too about all other nations. However, when a Jew is seized and put on trial, the solidarity that Jews have toward each other will make every Jew throughout the world stop and pray for the welfare of that other Jew.

This is how the Chortkever Rebbe explained Chazal's statement that "You are called Odom." The Hebrew language is extremely precise in terms of the different connotations of apparent synonyms. Other words for "man" has a singular and a plural – ish, anashim, gever, gevarim. However, the word Odom is the same whether referring to one or many. The singular term "Odom" fits the Jews. All Jews are considered as a single entity. There is no dichotomy. We are all in this together. The reason why the word "Odom" is employed referring to Jews is because this is the only term for humanity that has no plural and the Jewish people are a singular people.

This is not a racist or bigoted interpretation. It is a unique attribute of the Jewish people that has been demonstrated time and time again in ancient times and we are experiencing it right now. If one Jew is held hostage, Jews around the world feel the pain and storm the heavens. When heroic soldiers of the IDF are fighting, Jewish weddings around the world are interrupted with a prayer on their behalf.

With Israel's victory against Iran, we hope and pray that Hamas surrenders, releases the hostages, and Jewish people around the world can live with the peace and tranquility we deserve. But until they do, we will always feel a sense of responsibility for and oneness with one another.

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**Parshas Korach**
**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen by the Glowinsky family.

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. 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.

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 Yisroel 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. Thus, they 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.

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https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/410651

**Korach:** Trump bombed our enemies, FDR refused to bomb railroad tracks to Auschwitz

Iran will remain a world threat because the U.S. and Israel did not finish the job in the fashion dictated in the Torah. But we must recognize that Trump made up for FDR's refusal to bomb the tracks leading to Auschwitz.

**Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

The Tanach (Kings 1, chapter 18) records that Eliyahu HaNavi confronted the evil Achav (Ahab), king of the 10 northern tribes, with a challenge. To gather on Mount Carmel with many of his subjects along with 450 prophets of the idol Baal for a test.

Two altars would be constructed, each with a slaughtered bull prepared for sacrifice, but with no fire lit. The prophets of Baal would call on their god to send fire, and Eliyahu would call on Hashem; and the deity who answered would be proven as the authentic one.

The prophets of Baal went first. From morning until noon, they cried out to Baal, danced around their altar, gashing themselves ritually, hoping to provoke a response. Eliyahu taunted them, suggesting that perhaps the Baal is occupied with personal matters, perhaps he is sleeping or even traveling. Despite their fervent efforts, there was no fire and no response.

Towards late afternoon, after their dismal failure, came Eliyahu's turn.

He repaired a long broken-down altar to Hashem, using twelve stones representing the tribes of Israel. And in order to make the awesome miracle even more undeniable, he requested that the slaughtered bulls, the altar and its wood, be drenched with twelve large jugs of water, enough to fill a large trench around the altar.

Then Eliyahu uttered a prayer, asking Hashem to show that He is the omnipotent God of creation and of the Jews. Fire immediately appeared out of nowhere and consumed not only the sacrifice and the wood, but also the stones of the altar and even the water in the trench.

Witnessing this undeniable display of divine power, the Jews bowed as one and exclaimed, "Hashem - He is the only God! Hashem - He is the only God!" Eliyahu then commanded seizure of all the prophets of Baal to be brought to the Kishon Valley and killed.

My question regarding this dramatic incident is: after realizing the feebleness, collapse and impotence of their deity, why didn't the prophets deny the deity of Baal and submit to the Jewish God? Why had he forsaken his faithful children? E-lokim, the God of Yisrael is true, and Allah is a fiction?

This same question arose now when the Ayatollahs of Iran and other Islamic religious leaders witnessed the incredible miracles that were performed for the Jews in the miniscule State of Israel (land area of Iran is 80 times larger than Israel and their population is 9 times greater). Why didn't they rise up and yell, "where is Allah?"

Answer: Belief in a higher being goes beyond an individual's logic and experience. The prophets of Baal went to their deaths believing that Eliyahu was a master magician, but their Baal was still Baal.

So too with the warped minds of Islamics. We can beat them to a pulp, but their sense of honor will lead them to Gehennom before they admit that E-lokim is the true G-d.

It appears that the only solution when dealing with people like this is the one proscribed in the Torah regarding the ten nations whom we found in the land when entering with Yehoshua bin Nun.

Is there an Eliyahu or a Yehoshua bin Nun anywhere among us today? If so let him step forward and lead.

The 3,000-year-old battle continues

In the minds of most observers, the Arab - Israeli "conflict" is a manifestation of an unresolved political conflict over land, resources, security, and national identity, marked by periods of conventional warfare and ongoing asymmetric violence.

The impression I receive from President Trump's statements and actions regarding the Arab-Israeli battles is like a parent hovering over his young children as they fight over an irrelevant crayon, and he imposes his parental authority. When and where you can shoot, when there will be a cease fire, and for how long, etc.

But this is far from the truth. The Arab Israeli "free-for-all" is not a mere conflict. It is a three-thousand-year-old struggle to the death between the two sons of Avraham - Yitzchak and Yishmael and their descendants; where Yitzchak is faithful to E-lokim and Yishmael chooses idol worship, Avoda Zara, that has turned into devotion to Allah.

In this three millennium-year-old battle, no holds are barred, and no side will cede.

Evil minds and hearts like the Jihadi Moslems never forget and never forgive. They are like snakes waiting for their prey. By not destroying the regime, and permitting them to reconstruct their atomic facilities, their first ten nuclear bombs to be constructed will be directed at the US, the second batch at Christian Europe, the third will explode over Tehran.

Iran will remain a world threat because the U.S. and Israel did not finish the job in the fashion dictated in the Torah.

Next Battleground: The Strait of Hormuz

The Zohar (end of parashat Va'eira, second parasha in the book of Shemot) reveals that the "Sons of Yishmael" will, in the future, provoke three great wars against the descendants of Edom (Esau); one on the sea, another on land, and the third in the vicinity of Yerushalayim where Yishmael will then be totally destroyed.

I suggest: At the exact moment of our planet's creation, Hashem had already navigated Man's destiny through the design and placing of continents, with their specific raw materials essential for the development of societies.

Hashem placed huge underground oceans of petroleum for the benefit of the descendants of Yishmael, leaving a relatively modest quantity of natural gas in the Mediterranean for the descendants of Yitzchak.

Around 20-30% of global oil trade and approximately one-fifth of global natural gas transit the Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, leading out to the Gulf of Oman and from there to the Arabian ocean, and Indian and Pacific oceans.

As matters are now developing and the present threats of the Iranian Nazi regime, it appears that the battleground of Yishmael's naval battle against the Christian west will be at the Strait of Hormuz. This strait is of immense importance due to its critical role in global energy and international trade. It is the world's most important oil transit choke point. A significant portion of the world's seaborne oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes through this narrow waterway.

The Strait provides the only sea passage from the oil-rich Persian Gulf to the open ocean (Arabian Sea and beyond). Countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Qatar, Iran, and Kuwait rely heavily on this strait for their crude oil and natural gas exports.

Any disruption or threat to the flow of oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz can immediately cause significant price spikes in global energy markets. This will have a cascading effect, leading to higher fuel costs, impacting economies worldwide.

At its narrowest point, the Strait is only about 33 kilometers (21 miles) wide, with shipping lanes just 3 kilometers wide in each direction. This makes it highly vulnerable to blockades, military actions, or even terrorist attacks, which could severely impact global supply chains.

The Iranians have threatened to block the strait with sea mines even though they themselves will be the big losers. It would be by international law "casus belli" (Latin term meaning "a cause of war" or "an act or event that provokes or is used to justify war").

President Trump made the correct choice

President Trump deliberated with his advisors whether to get involved in the Iranian situation by bombing their major nuclear facilities. We are not privy to the issues involved nor his inner thoughts, or perhaps the impulses imposed on him by Hashem through his conscience, but there is an interesting issue.

Every day 12,000 Jews were murdered in the Auschwitz Birkenau camps alone. They were brought from all over Europe by train and to many other death camps that dotted the landscape of Europe. Jewish leaders begged FDR to bomb the track leading to these camps. Every day that the trains would not run thousands of Jewish lives would be saved.

How many times did the US Air Force, which flew in the vicinity of many of these camps, bomb them?

NOT EVEN ONCE!

I recall an interview with a Jewish pilot whose plane had to land but could not because of the bombs he was carrying. He was commanded to jettison the bombs but warned not to drop them over the rail tracks leading to the camps!

This is an indelible stain on the moral history of America.

President Trump was in a similar situation last week, with an opportunity to blur that stain somewhat.

MAGA! President Trump chose the right direction of history by bombing the elements designed to murder millions of Jews as was planned in ancient Persia and intended to be put into practice by their present-day descendants.

In closing: What is unfolding now is just the beginning of an ongoing world change.

A world where the Jewish nation, led by Hashem, ascends the historical stairway to world leadership.

GREAT TO BE A JEW!

Shabbat Shalom!_____

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**By Miracle or by Natural Means**

**Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

**Revivim**

Whether it is proper to bless on the military success in Iran ● Whether it is correct to define what happened there as a miracle ● The precision of the Ran on the verse "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you might to be successful" ● How to maintain humility, while on the other hand, not denying the power that God gave us ● And what was special about King David, that specifically he merited the greatest victories – and without miracles

Shehecheyanu

Q: Was it proper to bless "Shehecheyanu" or "HaTov VeHametiv" after Israel's security forces succeeded in striking the top of Iran's military command, and also after the United States joined Israel and bombed Iran's nuclear facilities? And which blessing should have been recited?

A: Anyone who felt joy from this, there was room to bless "Shehecheyanu" for having merited to strike our enemies and their weapons of war in the eyes of the entire world. However, there is no halachic obligation in this, since there are two types of "Shehecheyanu" blessing, one chova (obligatory) and the second, mitzvat reshut (a voluntary commandment). The halachic obligation – on holidays, and their commandments; the voluntary commandment – on joyful things that are renewed for a person and make him happy, where the one who blesses fulfills a commandment, but one who does not bless, does not transgress a sin. Since this blessing depends on joy of the heart, and there is no fixed measure and standard for joy, consequently, it is impossible to establish it as an obligation (see, Peninei Halakha: Berakhot 17: 2, 1).

And it is correct to bless "Shehecheyanu" and not "HaTov VeHametiv," since the blessing "HaTov VeHametiv" was instituted for a tangible joy that is shared by at least two people, like spouses who buy a new house and new appliances, or on drinking an additional type of wine consumed in company of others. Whereas the blessing "Shehecheyanu" is a more general thanksgiving, that was also instituted for good news that has no tangible benefit, like one who hears that his son received an important prize, or earned a very large profit (Peninei Halakha, ibid 17:8). And this

good news of bombing the nuclear facilities is not tangible like financial profit, or buying a house or appliances, that one blesses "HaTov VeHametiv" on, but it is good news about removing existential danger and raising Israel's honor, and therefore, its blessing is "Shehecheyanu."

In addition to this, one should not be so concerned about saying a bracha levatala (a blessing said in vain) regarding "Shehecheyanu," since according to the Rivash (section 505), since this blessing is reshut (voluntary), the rule safek brachot le'hakel ("in doubt regarding blessings, be lenient"), does not apply to it, and in a place of doubt, one who is happy is permitted to bless. And even though most authorities did not agree with his opinion, not a few authorities agreed, among them the Bach, Pri Chadash, Eliyahu Rabbah, Tzelach and Chatam Sofer. Therefore, whenever it appears that one should bless "Shehecheyanu," one should bless without worrying about saying a blessing in vain.

However, those who want to also bless "HaTov VeHametiv" can drink wine in company of others and bless "HaGefen," and afterwards, drink an additional type of wine that from one aspect is better, and bless on it "HaTov VeHametiv," and rejoice by way of it, over the salvation that was granted us.

Whether the Successes in the War with Iran are Miracle or Nature

Q: "A debate arose among a group of friends. Some claimed that the success of the attacks on Iran is a wondrous and wonderful miracle, since naturally, such great success would be impossible. On the other hand, some claimed that the success was caused through natural means, owing to wise, diligent, and idealistic people, who planned and executed it. Who is right?

A: It must be prefaced that the difference between nature and miracle is only from man's perspective, that the orders of nature appear to him as self-evident and maintained by their own forces, while miracles are not understood by him, and therefore, they impress him more. But from the Creator's perspective, there is no difference between nature and miracle, since God gives life to everything, to nature and to miracle alike. Therefore, what is called a miracle can also be called nature, and on the other hand, nature can also be considered a miracle, because it exists only through God, as we say in prayer: "Your miracles that are with us every day" (Ramban, Exodus 13: 16).

In other words, the discussion whether it is a miracle or nature is only from man's perspective, and from man's perspective, these are great successes that were achieved with God's help by means of nature. It is not about miracles, because they did not deviate from the laws of nature, but like all things in the world, they exist by God's kindnesses, all the more so when it comes to special successes, where God's help is more evident in them.

What is the Damage in Defining Them as Miracles

Q: Even if every success can be explained by means of nature, is it not correct that the overall success is a wonderful miracle that must be recognized?! And what is the damage in defining what happened as a miracle, is this not an expression of greater faith?

A: First, the error in the incorrect definition is the damage. God's seal is truth (Shabbat 55a), and any deviation from truth leads us away from walking in God's ways.

Second, defining something that was done with wisdom, diligence and courage as a miracle might cause people to rely on miracles, while neglecting the Torah commandments to serve in the army, and become negligent in the commandments of Yishuv Ha'Aretz (Settling the Land), which includes developing the state scientifically, and economically.

One must be precise and say that we reached all these successes with God's help. In other words, the military achievements were achieved by idealistic, talented and brave people, who for years, with diligence and resourcefulness, gathered intelligence and formulated successful plans. And thanks to heroic soldiers who trained for the missions, risked their lives, and went out to the enemy's country by air and land, and struck it a hard blow. However, without God's help, even the most diligent and talented would not succeed in their deeds, all the more so, when it comes to such extraordinary successes. As it is said: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it; unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman keeps vigil in vain" (Psalms 127:1). That is, one must be diligent in building the house and posting guards, but without God's help, they will not succeed – just as the Iranians did not succeed despite all their efforts, because God does not want the success of the wicked.

In summary, when defining the successes properly, they arouse us to thank God for His help, and to continue being diligent in developing the State of Israel in science, economy and security.

Is There No Concern of "My Strength, and the Might of My Hand"

Q: Is there no concern that when defining successes by means of nature, one arrives at pride, and sins by saying 'kochki ve'otzem yadi' ("my strength, and the might of my hand made me successful"?

A: The use of the expression "my strength, and the might of my hand" is mistaken, and often even accompanied by the sin of disparaging the commandments of military service, which is a commandment that is equivalent to all the commandments, through which we settle the Land, and through which, we save Clal Yisrael (all of Israel).

I will elaborate a bit in explaining the context. The Torah commanded us to keep all the commandments, including the commandment of Settling the Land, as it is said: "All the commandment which I command you today you shall observe to do, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the Land which the Lord swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 8:1). After that, the Torah warned us not to forget all the kindnesses and miracles that God did for us in the wilderness, lest as a result of the blessing and success that greatly empowers man, we become proud, and forget God and the mission placed upon us. As it is said: "And you say in your heart, my strength and the might of my hand made me this success" (Deuteronomy 8:17), and as a result, we will perish from the good Land.

So that this would not happen, the Torah taught: "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you might to be successful, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18). The Ran [Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven (1290 – 1376)], was precise and explained, that if the Torah wanted to diminish the value of Israel's handiwork, it would have said: "for He gives you success," but it said "for He gives you might to be successful," to teach us that Israel, through their might, are successful, except that they must remember that God gave them this power (Ran, beginning of Derush 10).

We see then, that when Israel takes pride in their might and the strength of their hand, without remembering that God gave them the power, they sin in pride, and their punishment is to perish from the good Land. And likewise, when they deny the power that God gave them, they continue to sin in the 'Sin of the Spies', denying God's guidance, and being negligent in His commandments, and for this too, they are punished, and perish from the good Land.

Should a Day of Joy and Song be Established Like the Song of the Sea?

Question from another person: "Is it not proper to establish for the great miracles that happened to us a holiday, and to recite a song like the 'Song of the Sea', for after all, the miracle that was performed for us is great, just like the splitting of the Red Sea, and the salvation of Hezekiah, who was punished for not singing a song?"

A: One must be careful of exaggerations. Hezekiah was saved from the army that threatened to destroy him, without any effort on his part. The splitting of the Red Sea was the greatest miracle that completed the Exodus from Egypt, and by means of this, God was revealed to the world through His people. But following this, there were no such great miracles. On the contrary, the main guidance of the people of Israel, residing in the Land of Israel, should be by natural means, and by way of this, complete faith is revealed, namely, that all humanity, with the nation of Israel at their center, continue God's word and His blessing to the world (see Peninei Halakha: Faith and Its Commandments 18: 3-5).

Not only that, but such is the world's pattern, that after revealed miracles crises occur, and the greater the miracle, the greater the crisis. Because following great miracles, people have difficulty continuing to conduct their lives with greatness, and they fall. Thus, it happened to those who left Egypt, that after all the great miracles, they sinned in the 'Sin of the

Golden Calf' and the 'Sin of the Spies', and were punished to die in the wilderness.

In the Way of King David

In our generation, we must conduct ourselves in the way of King David, who never relied on miracles, only asked God to help him prepare his soldiers, and give him courage and resourcefulness to defeat his enemies. Thanks to this, he was the king who merited the greatest victories without miracles, and was the king who prayed to God most, and thanked and praised Him more than all other kings. Our Sages said about him: "All of David's life, he never saw a good dream" (Berakhot 55b), rather, all of his dreams were bad, about wars, destruction and desolation (Zohar Part I 200:1). However, because he had great faith, his bad dreams did not discourage him, but rather, caused him to recognize all the dangers lurking around him, and thus, he was diligent in preparing his army and was always alert, and thanks to this, he saved Israel.

We must learn from King David to always prepare for war, and to pray to God that He be our help, and to thank and sing before Him with musical instruments for every salvation, without a trace of arrogance.

However, on days when we merited to advance tangibly in fulfilling the commandment of Settling the Land, which is the essence of the Redemption, there is an obligation to establish holidays. Therefore, we celebrate on Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day), and on Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

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[CS Addition:

Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Korach 5785

Alan Fisher

BS"D

We all hope that Operation Rising Lion successfully destroyed enough of Iran's nuclear program to set back its nuclear weapon program for decades. Hopefully the cease fire will last a long time. It is encouraging that no other country participated with Iran in fighting against Israel or the U.S. After the extremely impressive force from these countries, hopefully more countries will join the Abraham Accords and bring some peace to the Middle East.

I recommend highly going to parsha.net Friday morning to download the Internet Parsha Sheet. It is an outstanding compilation that normally posts shortly after midnight Thursday night.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

BS"D

June 27, 2025.

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #36, June 27-28, 2025;2 Tammuz 5785; Korach 5785

Rosh Hodesh Tammuz is Thursday and Friday, 30 Sivan - 1 Tammuz

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. May we verify that the 12 Day War did knock out Iran's nuclear capability, and may Hashem continue to protect Israel and all our people from our enemies and their weapons.

Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l, whose fifth yahrzeit is 4 Tammuz. Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohan-Sedgh, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her.

Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, uses evidence from the Torah to prove that the final events involving the generation of the Exodus all take place during a single week. Miriam's tzaraat (chapter 12), the departure of the Meraglim (chapter 13), and Korach's rebellion (chapter 16) all take place between 22 and 29 Sivan in the second year after the Exodus. (See Torah Anthology 13.333-34.) Since this Shabbat is 2 Tammuz, last week was the anniversary of these distressing events.

Korach's rebellion is the final episode in the Torah discussing the generation of the Exodus. The Torah opens next week with chapter 19, the law of becoming tahor after contact with a dead body (originally presented to Moshe while B'Nai Yisrael are still next to Har Sinai but only recorded in the Torah here, after the final discussion of the generation doomed to die off without entering the land). After a gap of 38 years, the Torah continues in chapter 20 with events of the final year in the Midbar.

The Torah presents the relationship between Moshe and Korach (Shemot 6:16-26). Levi's second son, Amram, has three sons: Gershon, Kohat, and Merari. Kohat, the second son, has four sons; Amram is the oldest, and Izhar is second oldest. Amram has two sons, Aharon and Moshe. Korach is the oldest son of Izhar, the second oldest son of Kohat. Since Aharon's and Korach's fathers are brothers, Moshe and Korach are first cousins. Moshe is the second son of the oldest brother, and Korach is the oldest son of Amram's next oldest brother. Since Moshe is the second oldest son of Levi's second oldest son, there is family history among the Levi's descendants of second oldest sons having religious priority over first born sons (as there had been in numerous generations in Sefer Bereishis). In terms of precedent of which relative will become the religious leader of a given generation, Korach could expect his claim to equal that of Moshe, all else equal.

Originally, the concept in the Torah was for a first born son to be the religious leader of a given generation. After the sin of the Golden Cow (Egel Zahav), where all tribes except Levi participate, God removes the religious leadership of each family from the first born son to descendants of Levi. This change takes place in Behaalotecha. God gives the religious leadership to direct descendants of Aharon (the Kohanim), and descendants of Levi have the other religious obligations, including carrying the Mishkan and holy objects used inside the Ark. Korach objects to Aharon and his sons, not he, being the Kohanim.

The presentation of the disputes in the parsha can be difficult to follow, because Korach brings members of Reuven (Yaakov's first born son) and numerous other first born sons from other tribes, all of whom lose their religious leadership roles after Egel Zahav. This large group joins Korach and his sons to challenge Aharon and Moshe for both religious and political leadership. (At the last minute, Korach's sons decide to go with Moshe, rather than their father, and they do not die in the challenge.) Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's Devar Torah, included as an attachment to the email version, sorts out the various groups and makes the separate stories easy to follow.

The Torah opens the parsha by stating that Korach takes, without indicating what he takes. Rabbi Marc Angel considers explanations among early commentators, rejects them all, and concludes that Korach takes nothing, only himself. Korach is all bluster with no evidence, no arguments, nothing to explain why he, not Aharon, deserves to be Kohen Gadol. Rabbi Haim Ovadia contrasts the Korach in the Torah with Korach in Midrash. The Midrash presents articulate and convincing reasons why Korach's case for replacing Aharon as Kohen Gadol has merit. During the time of writing the Midrash, many kohanim's extreme presentations of halacha would conclude that poor homeowners owed substantial payoffs to the kohanim. A later reform required that any payment that a person had to turn over to the kohanim would go to some other Kohen, not the Kohen making the ruling.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that Korach would attack the person, not the message. Korach thus attacks Moshe personally but offers no evidence why Korach, rather than Moshe or Aharon, should be the leaders of B'Nai Yisrael. As Rabbi Sacks observes, we see this evil today, especially in universities and in the cancel culture of political extremists. Writing in 2020, Rabbi Sacks condemned the practice of not letting opponents speak – at universities, demonstrations, and in political contexts. Rabbi Sacks' insights predicted the woke and anti-Semitic demonstrations and violence that reached across universities, high schools, and into synagogues – in many countries – in recent years. One reaction to this extremist behavior could have been the unexpectedly strong showing of the Republican party in the 2024 U.S. elections. Hopefully the successful campaign against Iran's nuclear weapons – with virtually no support for Iran even from enemies of Israel and the United States – is one indication that the followers of Moshe are replacing many of the followers of Korach at long last.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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[CS Added:

https://torahweb.org/torah/special/2025/ryud_israelwar.html

**Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

**Pay Back**

I believe that everyone remembers their excitement and relief upon hearing the news immediately after havdalah on motzaei Shabbos Parshas Shlach, when we learned of the United States' involvement in the Israel-Iran conflict. The immediate response was "Baruch Hashem" - thank You, Hashem, for Your intervention. Right after that, I recalled the Gemara (Brachos 35b) which says that it is an added blessing "when your work is done for you by others." Those with a more attuned halachic mind even recited the beracha upon hearing good news - Hatov v'Hametiv, that He is good and bestows goodness on others. The only debate was whether the blessing should be said with Hashem's name or not. But all agreed - it was a moment of thanksgiving. Thank You, Hashem.

This concept is taught in Gittin (38a), where Rav Pappa says, "Ammon and Moav were purified by Sichon." Hashem forbade (Devarim 2:9-19) the Jewish people

from attacking or conquering the land of Ammon and Moav, since they were our cousins, descended from Lot, Avraham's nephew. Yet shortly thereafter, when Bnei Yisrael asked to pass through the land of Sichon and Og, not only were they denied, but they were attacked, and Bnei Yisrael defeated them. Since Sichon and Og had previously conquered the territory of Ammon and Moav, our defeat of them enabled us to live on that land. Thus, Rav Pappa teaches that our work was done for us by others.

We see this idea in our liturgy. Every amidah begins with the blessing of Avos, in which we praise Hashem as Gomel chasadim tovim - He who bestows good kindnesses. Isn't every kindness good? The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l explained that Hashem not only helps us get the job done, but His kindness is tov – good - in that He allows us to feel as though we accomplished it, even though it is really done through His help. It is truly our work being done by Others.

Similarly, in Tehillim (62:13), the verse says: "And Yours, O Lord, is kindness, for You repay each man according to his deeds." The Alter of Kelm zt"l interpreted this to mean that Hashem rewards us based on our deeds, even though any good we achieve is only possible through His assistance.

There is no question that we are living in special times. Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed this sentiment when he thanked the United States for their assistance and concluded by acknowledging that it could not have happened without Siyata D'Shmaya - Divine assistance. Sometimes we don't recognize Hashem's involvement in world events until later; other times, like now, it is immediately clear.

How should we respond?

The Gemara (Shabbos 33b) tells us that after R' Shimon bar Yochai emerged from hiding in the cave, having been saved from the Romans, he said, "Since a miracle was performed for me, I will go and remedy something for the community." We owe Hashem a response. The Gemara discusses two or three different actions he took to benefit others after his salvation. We, too, have witnessed a miracle - perhaps not over twelve years, but over twelve days, truly a Divine wink. How should we respond?

Pirkei Avos (5:22) teaches, in the words of Ben Bag Bag, "Delve into the Torah and continue to delve into it, for everything is in it." And indeed, the Gemara in Shabbos tells us that when the Torah says (Bereishis 33:18), "And Yaakov arrived intact," it means that he was whole in body, in wealth, and in Torah. The verse continues, "and he encamped before the city," which the Rabbis understand to mean that he contributed to the welfare of the community of Shechem. This ties into another teaching in Shabbos (32a), that when someone experiences a miracle, they may lose some of their merit as payment. Yaakov shows us that we must give back - responding to miracles with acts of kindness and public service.

We see this again in Shemos (17:11), "When Moshe raised his hands, Israel was stronger; when he lowered them, Amalek was stronger." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 29a) asks: Did Moshe's hands win the battle? No - the verse teaches that when the Jewish people looked upward and focused their hearts on their Father in Heaven, they prevailed. Unlike standard military strategies that require watching the enemy, here success came from looking upward - acknowledging that Hashem is, as the Shira says (Shemos 15:3), the true Master of war.

We are living in extraordinary times. Just as in the Six-Day War, we were again privileged to see miraculous military success - the destruction of the Iranian air force in half an hour, in the middle of the night. This stands in contrast to most of Jewish history, when we were pursued by our enemies. Now, we are taking the initiative.

Think about it: what do we want from Iran? Do we want their land? Do we wish to annex them? No. And yet, they seek to destroy us. Iran's animosity is irrational. As Bereishis Rabbah (55) states: "Both love and hatred break the bounds of protocol." I'm not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I believe that when we experience such clear Divine intervention, we must respond with equally elevated behavior.

How can additional gemilus chasadim and talmud Torah not only prevent any reduction in our merits but actually generate more Divine blessings? Chazal teach that mitzvos help in the moment, but Torah study sustains for the future.

The Gemara (Megillah 13a) tells us that Achashverosh's handing his ring to Haman did more to unify the Jewish people than all the rebuking of the Prophets. It spurred real change and repentance. May this difficult and inspiring time do the same - bring us together and strengthen our commitment to Torah and acts of kindness. Repairing a relationship, apologizing even when you're right, or learning one extra Mishnah a day - all of these are tangible responses.

As King David says (Tehillim 122:2), "Our feet stood firm within your gates, O Jerusalem," which the Gemara (Makkos 10a) interprets to mean that our military strength comes from Torah study in Jerusalem.

May we continue to daven and act for the safety of the hostages, our soldiers, and all of Klal Yisrael, and may we continue to hear besuros tovos, yeshuos, v'nechamos.]

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**לע"נ**

**יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה**

**שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה**

**ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה**

**אנא מלכה בת ישראל**

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

by Rav Eitan Mayer

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

**WHAT ARE THEY AFTER?**

First of all, what do the rebels want?

Possibilities:
1) Priesthood?
2) Political leadership?
3) Something else?

Let us consider the evidence for each possibility:

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

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

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

**WHOM ARE THEY AFTER?**

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

**WHO ARE "THEY," ANYWAY?**

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

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

# 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.

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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

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**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?]