

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

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. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

[Ed. note: I am writing on 3 Tammuz, the 32nd yahrzeit of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, the Lubavitch Rebbe of blessed memory.

In rushing to complete the Devrei Torah this week, I overwrote what I had completed, when nearly finished, and lost all my work of nearly two days. I had to rush to reproduce this material and did not have time for my usual editing and editorial comments.]

In preparing for my Devrei Torah this week, I have been astonished that so many Torah scholars accept the chronological order of this part of Sefer Bemidbar and ignore the insights of Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, who demonstrates that based on the locations of B'Nai Yisrael during the second year of the Exodus, that the sin of the Meraglim must have taken place after Korach's rebellion (see *Torah Anthology*, vol. 13, pp. 333-35). In one sense Rabbi Magriso's conclusion is obvious. Miriam's tzaraat requires a delay of one week. The Korach rebellion takes place over a few days. The Meraglim are absent for forty days, and their sin takes place on Tisha B'Av, only after their forty days touring Canaan.

Given the statements at various places in the in the Torah about where B'Nai Yisrael are during that summer, it is difficult to accept that two to three million people return from the Paran desert to Chatzerot forty days after leaving. The more obvious interpretation is that the people move closer to Canaan to meet the scouts when the ten men return from their investigation (read the *Torah Anthology* pages carefully). While the scouts depart from B'Nai Yisrael the same week as Miriam's tzaraat and Korach's rebellion, the sin of the majority evil scouts only takes place nearly six weeks after they depart. The classic source that Korach's rebellion takes place after the sin of the Meraglim is Ramban, who argues that the Torah is chronological in almost all cases. Rashi, for example, argues that the Torah is more often thematic and that the Torah changes the chronological order fairly often to preserve thematic integrity. (Rabbi Menachem Leibtag discusses the differing chronological positions of Rashi and Ramban in many of his Devrei Torah.)

What strikes me in reading numerous Devrei Torah this week to prepare to compile the material below is how frequently this parsha raises issues across generations. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that Moshe and Shmuel, subject of the Haftorah, share the shortcoming that none of their sons approach the spiritual heights of their fathers. Datan and Aviram, from the tribe of Reuven, join Korach's rebellion in protest for the first born sons losing the religious leadership of the new generation. Since Reuven is Yaakov's first born son, this loss is an understandable grievance for these men. Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer's focus on the responsum of Rav Avraham Salnik (Poland, ca. 1550-1620) fits the theme of issues across generations. Rav Salnik argues that an older person who becomes blind should maintain the privilege of

having an aliyah and that to deny that honor to them would lead to members of the community feeling excluded and prone to abandon their religious fervor. Many of us face the challenge of raising children to maintain the religious intensity that we feel. This challenge comes through not only in my life but also in several of the Devrei Torah below.

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz addresses a similar issue with respect to Korach's challenge to Moshe and Aharon. According to Rabbi Katz, in the Chassidic tradition, all Jews are holy, the starting point for Korach. However, Rabbi Katz explores this position and concludes that all of us face the challenge of finding holiness within ourselves, nourishing this holiness, and encouraging it to grow. Rabbi Brander focuses this challenge on us as parents. We should view ourselves as gardeners, creating conditions under which our children can take root, grow, and turn toward the light of our religious mitzvot.

Rabbi Brander has frequently written about a trend toward greater mitzvot among Israelis since October 2023. This week he writes about the 510 outstanding graduating seniors across Ohe Torah Stone's high schools – a large collection of outstanding future leaders of Israel and Klal Yisrael. May we also raise our children and encourage our grandchildren to stimulate their potential to “bring greater kindness to a fractured society, greater responsibility to a world in crisis, and greater faith to a generation searching for meaning.”

Little known insights such as those of Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso's on the timing of this section of Bemidbar remind me of the lessons that my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved to include as part of his Shabbat morning Torah discussions. Rabbi Cahan made each parsha come alive with these insights and connection across the Torah and other parts of Tanach. After nearly fifty years of learning from Rabbi Cahan, I share his fascination with the seventy layers of depth in the Torah – and I cherish adding to my store of knowledge each week. May our children and grandchildren appreciate these insights and teach them to their children and grandchildren for many generations to come.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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

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; Avram David ben Zeez Esther; Aiah 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; Rena Michal bat Sara, 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.

Haftarat Parshat Korach: Sculptor or Gardener
By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

The connections between Parshat Korach and its haftarah – the final address of Shmuel to the people of Israel – are not difficult to find. Both center on a moment of leadership transition: Korach and his faction seek to displace Moshe, while the

people ask Shmuel to step aside in favor of a king. There is even a striking verbal parallel between the two passages. Moshe defends his integrity before the people: “I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I wronged any one of them” (Numbers 16:15). Shmuel echoes him almost word for word: “Whose ox have I seized, and whose donkey have I seized? Whom have I cheated, and whom have I oppressed, and from whose hand have I taken a bribe?” (I Samuel 12:3).

In both cases, a selfless leader is confronted by a public that wants something different, and in both cases, that leader insists that his motives have been honest and uncorrupted.

But beneath this parallel lies a quieter, more penetrating tension, one that first emerges earlier, when the people demand a king: “Look, you have grown old, and your sons have not followed in your path” (I Samuel 8:5).

This two-part complaint deserves careful attention, because each half carries a very different weight, challenging all leaders to find a balance between public and family life. This balance is crucial today as Am Israel faces serious fractures and threats as a nation: fractures and threats that also affect individuals and families on a personal level as we and our children all navigate war, antisemitism, uncertainty and social discord.

The first half of the people’s accusation in the haftarah – “you have grown old” – is, to some degree, a legitimate claim. Leadership has its seasons. A healthy community must be able to acknowledge when transition is necessary, and ensure continuity beyond any one individual. That part of the complaint, while uncomfortable, is appropriate.

But the second claim – “Your sons have not followed in your path” – cuts deeper. This is no longer about public leadership. It is a judgement on Shmuel as a father and mentor. The text itself makes the critique explicit: his sons “were bent on gain, and they took bribes, and they perverted justice” (v. 3). Whatever potential they may have had, something essential in their formation was missing.

Shmuel, who had devoted his life to shepherding the nation through its most turbulent years, may not have been able to invest with the same intensity in his own children.

Shmuel is not alone. Hundreds of years earlier, Moshe Rebbeinu, who spoke “face to face” with God and led the people for forty years through their most formative period, remains a strikingly distant figure in the lives of his own children. The Torah tells us almost nothing about them, and later Rabbinic sources suggest that they drifted far from the path that their father walked, even so far as to indulge in foreign forms of worship. The contrast is as sobering as it is tragic: even the greatest of leaders may struggle to bridge the distance between public mission and private sphere.

The Talmud names this tension with painful honesty, describing Torah scholars as sometimes becoming “as cruel to their children and families as ravens” (Eruvin 22a), not from malice, but because the demands of communal responsibility can be all-consuming.

What emerges is not an isolated failure, but a recurring challenge within leadership itself. There are limits to what any family can absorb when a parent is called to serve. Children who grow up waiting for a parent who is always somewhere else – answering the community’s urgency, the people’s crises, the nation’s needs – may eventually stop waiting.

What makes Shmuel’s story particularly poignant is that he himself grew up in the shadow of this same failure. He rose to leadership in the aftermath of Eli the priest’s shortcomings as a father; his first prophetic call (I Samuel 3) was a message of divine judgment against Eli’s household. Raised in the Mishkan, Shmuel was shaped by priestly discipline and devotion, but not necessarily by a model of present, attentive family life. Moshe, too, grew up at a distance from his family, formed in a palace rather than a home. Perhaps neither man was given a full domestic template. They could lead a people; but they had never fully seen what it means to lead a family.

This is what makes the people’s incidental complaint so stinging, and what gives our haftarah enduring force. It asks a question that extends far beyond Shmuel. What are the unseen costs of leadership? And who bears them?

The Torah does not ask us to raise children in our image; that is the sculptor’s approach. A sculpture may be impressive, but it can crack and shatter under pressure.

A parent is closer to a gardener, creating the conditions in which a child can take root, grow, and turn toward the light in their own way.

Parshat Korach and its haftarah together challenge both communities and those who lead them to seek leaders who are not only principled in public, but whole in private. Leaders who remember that the family waiting for them at home is not a distraction from their mission. It may be the most important expression of it.

Shabbat Shalom.

From Rabbi Brander's notes regarding the graduation of 510 graduating seniors across Ohr Torah Stone's high schools:

As I watched them [these graduating seniors] receive their diplomas, I was focused not on what they had endured, but on what they have become. Time and again, they chose to turn outward: volunteering, supporting displaced families, helping wounded soldiers, and standing with those in need. Rather than letting adversity define them, they chose to use these challenges to actualize their true potential.

That is what I see in this graduating class: future leaders who, despite these immensely difficult times, exemplify resilience, compassion, and moral clarity. Shaped within our educational framework, they have the capacity to bring greater kindness to a fractured society, greater responsibility to a world in crisis, and greater faith to a generation searching for meaning.

[Ed.: we should all praise these outstanding OTS graduates, future leaders of Israel and Klal Yisrael]

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

Shabbat Shalom

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-korach-rabbi-brander-5786/>

Parshat Korach: A “Reasonable” Question Asked Unreasonably

By Rabbanit Rivky Krestt * (June 23, 2025)

“What was Korach’s crime? At first glance, Korach’s challenge to Moshe and Aharon seems almost democratic: “For the entire assembly – all of them – are holy, and the Lord is among them; why do you elevate yourselves above the Lord’s congregation?” In our modern era of questioning authority and demanding transparency, Korach’s words could sound like a reasonable reformer seeking justice.

But the Mishna presents Korach as the classic example of destructive controversy (Avot 5:17). What turned a potentially legitimate question into a catastrophic rebellion that literally swallowed its participants whole?

The Right Question, Wrong Method

The key isn’t in what Korach asked, but in how he asked it. Compare Korach’s approach to that of the daughters of Tzlofchad (Bamidbar 27), who also questioned an established law. The Talmud praises them as being “wise, interpreters of verses, and righteous,” noting that “they spoke in accordance with the moment” – they presented their case at just the right time (Bava Batra 119b). They went to Moshe directly, privately, and with genuine humility, seeking understanding rather than trying to undermine authority. When Moshe didn’t have an immediate answer, he consulted Hashem – and their question led to a positive change in Jewish law.

Korach, by contrast, staged a public spectacle. As Rashi explains, citing the Midrash Tanchuma, he gathered 250 men and mockingly asked Moshe whether garments made entirely of blue wool would require tzitzit – turning sacred law into street theater designed to humiliate rather than illuminate (Tanchuma Korach 2).

Moshe's response reveals the deeper issue. Rather than defending his authority, he immediately deflects: "Therefore, you and your entire assembly who are gathering are against the Lord, for what is Aharon that you should complain against him?" (Bamidbar 16:11). Moshe understood that legitimate leadership comes from divine mandate, not personal ambition.

The Hidden Villains

But here's where we must read carefully. Buried within Korach's rebellion are two figures whose presence seems almost incidental: Datan and Aviram. The Torah could have told Korach's story without them – so why are they here?

The Midrash gives us a crucial clue: these are the same two men who were fighting in Egypt when Moshe first tried to intervene (Shemot 2:13-14), responding to his peace-making efforts with shocking insolence: "Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us?" They were chronic troublemakers, consistent opponents of Moshe's leadership from day one.

The most telling detail comes in Moshe's different approaches to each faction – and their vastly different responses. With Korach and his 250 followers, Moshe engages directly, proposing the incense test that would let Hashem decide the matter. But when Moshe sends for Datan and Aviram, they refuse to come entirely, replying: "We will not go up! Is it not enough that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you would also lord over us?"

The Torah tells us that Moshe was deeply distressed by their refusal to engage. As the Tan uma explains, their unwillingness to enter dialogue and clarify the dispute was particularly painful to Moshe – because healthy controversy requires good faith engagement from all parties.

The Or HaChayim provides the key insight: "We learned that even though the Jews gathered against Moshe and Aharon, they would have returned if not for these two wicked men... they were the cause of the incident from beginning to end." Datan and Aviram weren't just participants in Korach's rebellion – they were its cynical architects, using Korach's legitimate frustrations for their own destructive ends.

Two Models of Questioning Authority

This teaches us something profound about the nature of constructive versus destructive criticism. The difference between disagreement for the sake of heaven and its opposite isn't always obvious from the surface.

Hillel and Shammai disagreed constantly, sometimes with tremendous passion. But the Talmud tells us they maintained "love and friendship" toward each other, and that Hillel's school would always present Shammai's position first before their own (Eruvin 13b, Yevamot 14b). Their goal was truth, not victory.

Korach's rebellion, by contrast, was driven by something else entirely. While Korach himself may have had genuine concerns about fairness and access to holiness, his movement was hijacked by those whose goal wasn't reform but destruction of legitimate authority altogether.

The Leadership Lesson

This story carries urgent relevance for our time. In an era of social media and viral controversies, the distinction between constructive criticism and destructive cynicism becomes crucial. Korach asked a reasonable question – why should some have privileged access to the divine when all Israel is holy? But he allowed his legitimate concerns to be weaponized by those whose agenda was purely destructive. The tragedy wasn't his question, but his method and his allies.

Conclusion: The Art of Sacred Dissent

Judaism is fundamentally a questioning faith. The daughters of Tzlofchad questioned Moshe and changed Jewish law. Korach questioned Moshe and was swallowed by the earth. The difference wasn't in their right to question, but in how they chose to exercise that right.

In our own communities and institutions, we'll inevitably face moments when authority must be questioned, and systems

must be reformed. The story of Korach reminds us that the method matters as much as the message. Are we seeking truth or seeking power? Are we building up or tearing down? Are we motivated by love for our community or by personal grievance?

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wisely taught: "It is easy to be a critic, but the only effective critics are those who truly love – and show they love – those whom they criticise" (Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible). The choice between becoming a Korach or a daughter of Tzlofchad remains ours to make.

Shabbat Shalom

* Alumna of OTS's International Halakha Scholars Program (IHSP) who writes curriculum for YU Global and teaches at Midreshet Lindenbaum

[Ed. note: from OTS: Among this year's overseas students at Midreshet Lindenbaum's Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program, 16 young women - 27% of the cohort - have chosen to remain in Israel next year to serve the country, whether in the IDF or some other form of National Service.]

<https://ots.org.il/shlach-yoni-applebaum/>

Dvar Torah: Korach: Up in Smoke

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2007

"Do this: Take for yourselves fire-pans – Korach and his entire assembly- and put fire into them and place incense upon them before HASHEM tomorrow. Then the man whom HASHEM will choose – he is the holy one. It is a lot for you Children of Levi!" (Bamidbar 16:6)

Do this: Take for yourselves fire-pans: ...We have One G-d HASHEM, one Ark, one Torah, one Altar and one Kohen Gadol (High Priest) yet you 250 men seek the High Priesthood. ...Here you have the dearest of all services which is incense but there is a deadly drug which is in it by which Nadav and Avihu were burned. This is why he warned them, "Then the man whom HASHEM will choose he will be the holy one"...Moshe told them, "See that that I say to you that the one whom G-d will choose he will emerge from the incense offering alive and all of you will die". (Rashi)

It is a lot for you Children of Levi: A lot has already been given to you that you have been chosen from amongst all the tribes for Divine Service. (Midrash)

Who is a fool? One who destroys all that is given to him. (Tractate Chagigah 4A)

Moshe challenges Korach and his crew to a show down with the deadly incense offering and in the same breath (verse) tells him that he's got a lot. What message is Moshe telling to Korach?

There was student of Yisrael Salanter who had assumed an important rabbinical position in Russia. The Czar Nicholas had a deep seeded hatred for this young and clever Rabbi. He wanted to kill him if he could, but he needed an excuse. Therefore he devised a plan. He invited community leaders from all over to his palace for a conference, including the one he aimed to trap. He called for the meeting to take place on Shabbos assuming that he would not show and that would be cause enough for him to do what he wanted to do. To Czar's surprise the Rabbi managed to attend without compromising on the Laws of Shabbos. Nicholas, though, was not finished. At one point he opened up a fancy cigar box and one by one, personally, handed a cigar of distinction to each of his invited guests. When he came to the Rabbi he expected to be snubbed but the Rabbi accepted the cigar reasoning that muktzah is rabbinical in origin and if he did it in a slightly different manner that would be "legally" acceptable.

Superseding all etiquette and protocol once again the Czar Nicholas proceeded to light the cigar of each guest individually. When he came to the Rabbi he knew that this would be the moment of truth. The Rabbi predictably and promptly withdrew

his cigar refusing the magnanimous gesture of the “all-powerful” Czar, adopting, as it were, a posture of rebelliousness.

The Czar was about ready to retaliate when the Rabbi preempted with the following explanation before the assembled guests, “Mighty Czar! I cannot let this cigar be burned away frivolously. It is far more valuable to me than that. I cherish it and prefer to put on display for my community and my people the precious gift I have received from such a great king as your- self.” Czar Nicholas’ plot was quieted and the Rabbi escaped with his life.

How true are those words he spoke?! If one would receive a gift from a king, it would be the height of foolishness to throw it away for no good reason. How much more so when one considers a gift that is given by the “King of Kings”... The Holy One Blessed Be He. Korach, as a Levi, had been selected for special service and so Moshe warned him. By lighting up that incense he was risking that every-thing good and great HASHEM had granted him in life would go **up in smoke**.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-korach/>

Korach: For the Entire Congregation is Holy

By Rabbi Dov Linzer*

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2019

The Korach story, in which Aharon’s right to the priesthood was challenged, ends with the Torah enumerating the special priestly gifts that to which the Kohanim are entitled (Bamidbar 18:8-20). On this special status of the priesthood, the Sifrei comments: “There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of kingship, and the crown of the priesthood. The crown of priesthood was taken by Aharon, the crown of kingship was taken by David, the crown of Torah, however, waits for anyone to take it.” This idea, that Torah is and should be accessible to all, is at the center of a responsum in the book Maseit Binyamin (no. 62), written by Rav Avraham Salnik (Poland, ca. 1550-1620), on the topic of whether a blind man can receive an aliyah.

In this responsum, Rav Salnik articulates a strong sense of moral and Torah obligation to ensure that everyone, regardless of circumstance or disability, is treated as an equal member of the community and is given full access to the Torah. He starts on a very personal note:

(1) Many great sages have debated whether a blind person can receive an aliyah and read from the Torah, this one permitting and this one forbidding.... And I said, “If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, leave not your place” (Kohelet 10:4), for you should not be cast off forever (Eicha 3:31). For... the Torah has always been placed in a corner, so that whoever wishes may come and take it. And even one mitzvah should not be negated.

(2) For behold, now in my old age, the sight from my windows has darkened, and my eyes have grown dim from sight (cf., Breishit 27:1). According to what the Rabbi (Yosef Karo) opined, I will be driven away this day from seeking refuge in the inheritance of the Lord (I Samuel 26:19)... God forbid that I should abandon the way of the tree of life, and from my youth I have grasped onto its branches, its laws, and its rule. Even in my old age I shall not cast it off. And I will open with the matter of halakha, to see for what purpose the Rabbi has done such a thing to me... I will stand firm and “speak regarding Your laws in the presence of kings and not be embarrassed”. (Ps. 119:46)

Rav Salnik opens with a statement of what has compelled him to write this teshuva. He expresses the sense of abandonment that can be felt by being excluded. Significantly, he invokes the sense that the Torah – as opposed to the priesthood or the kingship – is, and is supposed to be, available to all (Sifrei Korach, 119 and Rambam, Talmud Torah, 3:1), and to be excluded from the ritual of receiving an aliyah is symbolically to be told that one is excluded from a connection to Torah and Torah study. Implicitly responding to those who would say that “why is exclusion from one mitzvah so important?” he states that every mitzvah is weighty and we should not allow someone to lose the opportunity even to do one mitzvah.

In the next paragraph, he becomes much more personal. We now find out that he himself has become blind. He takes

personally the ruling of Beit Yosef, Rav Yosef Karo, that a blind man cannot receive an aliyah (“why has the Rabbi done such a thing to me?”). An impersonal, dispassionate ruling for a group of people is taken personally and passionately by those whom it affects. He once again speaks as to how this one exclusion will make him feel rejected from the world of Torah. This is reinforced by the phrase “not to be counted” among those who get an aliyah – when one isn’t counted, the message is that one does not count.

His statement that “And in my old age I shall not be cast aside,” reflects the disempowerment that often comes with the infirmities of old age, and in this case, with the reality of being blind. When such physical disempowerment is coupled with halakhic exclusion – for halakha sometimes makes requirements, like standing, speaking, hearing, and seeing, that cannot always be performed at this stage of life – the sense of disempowerment and rejection can be profound.

All that being said, it is quite remarkable that given his stature as a major posek of the time, one who had many people turning to him for halakhic guidance and teshuvot, the author would still feel so rejected “merely” because he could not receive an aliyah. This makes us realize how hard it is to fully appreciate, to have full empathy for, those who are being excluded when we are not in their shoes.

In the continuation of the teshuva, which we do not cite here, the author lays out three approaches to rendering a decision in a matter that is debated by earlier authorities, and goes on to show how his decision is supported through all three approaches. He concludes that a person who is blind, and an illiterate person, can receive an aliyah even lichatchilah.

We turn now to the closing section of the teshuva. The author here makes a critical point about the mandate of inclusion and the role that it plays in the halakhic process. While never compromising the integrity of the process, as seen above, it is clear that the author felt pushed to come to a certain conclusion.

(3) I remain astounded regarding those who forbid – how have they decided the law [with the effect] of casting off the Heavenly yoke from people? How much more so regarding an important and public mitzvah such as this! This is not what we have learned from our Rabbis, the authors of the Mishna and the Gemara! For behold... the Sages would take a sacrifice (which was being offered by women) into the Women’s Courtyard so that the women could do the laying of the hands... and regarding every positive time-bound mitzvah – women are permitted to perform them and recite the blessing over them...

(4) ...The Rabbis waived whatever concerns there might have been in these cases, because the value of accepting the Yoke of Heaven was more important, and also for the sake of giving religious satisfaction, as we said in Hagigah, “not because laying of the hands on sacrifices applies to women, but for the sake of giving religious satisfaction to women.”

(5) The same, then, is true in our case. We should waive [any concerns] in the case of the person who is not literate person and the person who is blind, and we should not object to them being *oleh* to the Torah and from making the blessings, so that they may be included in the accepting of the Yoke of Heaven and to give them religious satisfaction.

Rav Salnik was aware that there are those who would say, “Although he is not clearly incorrect, this issue is not ironclad and it remains debatable. Therefore, we should be strict, and not allow such a person to have an aliyah, since we wouldn’t want to make a *brakha li’vatalah* or not have all the aliyot done properly.”

The author turns the tables on this argument (paragraph 3). Rather than responding to “how could you be so lenient?” the author challenges those who would restrict, and say, “how could you be so lenient?!”. This argument could be made on the moral, *ben-adam-li’chaveiro* level. To rule restrictively means to hurt another person and is a compromise of our moral responsibilities. In other words, this would be being too lenient in the realm of *ben-adam-li’chaveiro*. In a similar vein, Rav Chaim Brisker said, “Don’t say that I am being lenient on *hillul Shabbat*; no. I am being very strict on *sakanat nefashot*, risk of life.” This is a calculus of weighing religious-moral obligations against religious-ritual ones.

Rav Salnik, however, makes a different argument. He states that to exclude someone is to be irresponsible in the religious-ritual realm as well. A person who is excluded feels rejected and alienated. Exclusion, then, can often lead to a

general feeling of alienation and can lead to a rejection of the Jewish community or a life of observance. Many, many cases such as this have occurred in the past and continue to occur today. This is then Maseit Binyamin's challenge to those who would restrict and exclude: "How have you decided the law to cast the Heavenly yoke from this people?!" To be strict about full mitzvah observance demands that we maximize inclusion.

What emerges from this section is that need for inclusion can push a posek to find a path within the halakhic system that will allow him to rule that no exclusion exists. Alternatively, it can push a posek to find a practical way to allow a person to participate, even though the law still excludes him or her on a technical level.

In his signing off, Rav Salnik does something strange. He references the parasha of the week by referring to it as "For the entire community is all holy."

Binyamin Aharon ben Avraham Salnik, Thursday, 3 Tamuz, 5370 (1610), Parshat "For the entire community is all holy."

This is, of course, none other than our parasha, parashat Korach. Although those words were articulated by Korach, and could be claimed to represent an ideology of full equality that is in opposition to that of the Torah, Rav Salnik implicitly states that Korach's statement was correct. Korach may have been using this ideology cynically and in a self-serving way, but in the end, what he said was true: everyone is holy, and everyone therefore has a right to have access to that which is holy.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

Nishmat haTorah: Parashat Korach
Parshat Korach: The Holiness Within
By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

One of my favorite fantastical childhood stories is related to this week's parsha, parshat Korach.

It is an audacious story, and for some of you, no doubt, it may sound a bit out there. But Chassidic stories are often powerful less because of their veracity than because of the religious message they convey. It is in that spirit that I share this unusual story.

The story is told about R. Moshe Teitelbaum, the Yismach Moshe (1759–1841). He believed that, in an earlier incarnation, he had lived among the generation that left Egypt and journeyed through the wilderness.

Once, as he described the conflict between Moshe Rabbeinu and Korach, he recalled that many of the prominent people of the generation were drawn to Korach, while the simpler members of the community remained loyal to Moshe.

His grandson asked him, "Zeidy, whose side were you on?"

The Yismach Moshe answered that he had remained neutral.

His grandson was astonished. "How could you not side with Moshe Rabbeinu?"

The Yismach Moshe responded, "Had you known how great Korach was, you would not ask such a question."

However one understands this story, its religious point is startling. Korach was not a simple villain. His challenge to Moshe was dangerous, and the Torah presents it as a rebellion that had to be defeated. But as the Yismach Moshe tells it, Korach's claim carried enough force that even he would not have dismissed it out of hand.

The Arizal gives this idea an even sharper formulation. In the Shir Shel Yom of Shabbat, the day that gestures toward the repaired world of the future, he finds a hidden allusion to Korach. In that future world, Korach will no longer be remembered only as the rebel who challenged Moshe. Something in his approach will be recognized and accepted.

The Yismach Moshe and the Arizal, each in his own way, point to the same striking idea: beneath Korach's rebellion there was a religious insight that could not simply be dismissed.

That insight is found in Korach's own words:

"You have gone too far! For the entire community, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?"

At first glance, Korach seems to be challenging Moshe and Aharon's leadership. Why should they stand above the rest of the community? But his words go deeper than that. Korach is also making a claim about where kedushah resides. Holiness, he says, is not concentrated only in leaders or in those who live on a visibly higher plane. It is present throughout the community.

That claim is profound. *Kol ha'eidah kulam kedoshim*: the whole community is holy. Kedushah is not the possession of a spiritual elite. It is not reserved for rare people with unusual gifts. Every person carries a *nitzotz Elohai*, an inner spark of Godliness, even when it is covered over or hard to reach. The religious task is to bring that hidden holiness forward and let it find expression in the way we live.

Korach's mistake was not that he believed holiness lives within ordinary people. That belief is true and precious. His mistake was that he turned that truth into a weapon against Moshe.

The truth at the heart of Korach's words is empowering, but it is also demanding. If holiness is already within us, then we cannot live as if kedushah belongs only to other people. We cannot outsource religious depth to those we admire. Religious leadership matters, of course. Torah needs guidance and authority. But the work itself cannot be delegated. Each person has to uncover the kedushah within and allow it to shape the way they live.

A well-known Chassidic story makes this point beautifully.

A man once dreamed that a treasure was buried under a bridge in Vienna. He traveled there and stood near the bridge, wondering how to dig without being seen. A guard noticed him and asked what he was doing. The man told him about his dream.

The guard laughed. "You foolish Jew. I also dreamed of a treasure buried under the oven in the home of a Jew in such-and-such a town." He then named the man's own town and house. "Do you think I would travel all that way because of a dream?"

The man returned home, dug beneath his oven, and found the treasure.

The treasure had been at home all along.

The point is not that one never needs to travel. The man had to go to Vienna in order to discover what was waiting in his own home. Sometimes we need someone else to help us recognize the treasure that was there all along.

That is the deeper version of Korach's claim. The treasure is already within. Kedushah is not imported from the outside. It is not created by leaders or owned by institutions. The task of religious life is to uncover it, nourish it, and allow it to flourish.

Korach's challenge also contains a warning for religious leaders. His question, *madua titnas'u*, "why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem," was not, by itself, a fair description of Moshe and Aharon. Their leadership was not self-appointed; it was commanded by God and necessary for the Jewish people. The Torah does not erase religious authority or pretend that all roles are the same.

But Korach's question still has to be heard. Leadership becomes dangerous when it forgets the holiness of the people it serves. A leader's task is not to eclipse the inner kedushah of the community, but to help reveal it.

Korach's sin was rebellion. His mistake was arrogance. But beneath the rebellion was a real religious claim: "The entire community, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them."

Not everyone is Moshe. Not everyone is Aharon. But every person carries a measure of kedushah that only they can bring into the world.

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/06/parshat-korach-the-holiness-within/>

Healthy and Unhealthy Controversy: Thoughts for Parashat Korah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

A problem arises, though, when theological and philosophical debates transform themselves into battles for power that call for the total defeat of opponents. On the surface, these controversies may seem to be "for the sake of Heaven"; yet, they are in fact fueled by egotism and the desire to crush opposition. Disputants in such controversies do not see the opinions of

their opponents as being “words of the living God,” but as blasphemies that cannot be tolerated in any way. When theological and philosophical disagreements slip into the category of Korah-controversies, this leads to violence and terrorism. Instead of being reflections of a search for truth, they become vehicles for oppression, fueling the overwhelming urge to crush those who dissent.

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

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

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

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/healthy-and-unhealthy-controversy-thoughts-parashat-korah>

Kohelet on Wealth and Wisdom: Between the Promise of Proverbs and the Reality of Life

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Introduction

Kohelet is a philosophical and introspective work that confronts the tension between inherited ideals—wisdom, righteousness, reward—and the painful unpredictability of real life. Among its central themes is the question of whether wealth and wisdom—so extolled by traditional texts like Proverbs—can truly offer a good life. Kohelet affirms their value, yet constantly challenges expectations about their efficacy, reliability, and permanence.

Traditional Assumptions about Wisdom and Wealth

While Proverbs teaches that wisdom and righteousness generally lead to blessing, Kohelet challenges this assumption more radically: not just that reward is delayed, but that it may never come at all. According to received wisdom, the wise understand the world, choose rightly, and flourish accordingly. The righteous, diligent person should be rewarded—through material success, moral clarity, and social stability. The wicked, by contrast, should suffer consequences. Wisdom, in this model, is not only morally elevating but pragmatically effective.

Kohelet affirms the tradition, yet challenges its promises in light of human experience.^[i] Real life, Kohelet insists, often fails to conform to the neat structures of traditional moral logic. The race is not always to the swift, nor bread to the wise (9:11). The wicked are buried with honor while the righteous are forgotten (8:10). In Kohelet's view, these apparent injustices do not disrupt the system—they are part of the system.

The Futility and Fragility of Wealth

Kohelet probes the instability of material success. The lover of money never finds satisfaction (5:9); the rich man cannot sleep (5:11). Wealth can be lost in an instant (5:13), or inherited by one unworthy (2:21). Even if a man possesses great riches and lives many years, if he cannot enjoy them, he is worse off than a stillborn child, who at least is spared the pain of longing unfulfilled (6:1–6). Death renders all accumulation meaningless—“as he came, so shall he go” (5:14). The world itself seems to sever the link between effort and outcome. This is not a condemnation of wealth per se, but a critique of the illusion that it can deliver security or permanence.

And yet, Kohelet does not advocate laziness. “The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh” (4:5). Nor does he argue for despair. Rather, he calls for modest, balanced effort: “Better a handful of rest than two fists of toil and pursuit of wind” (4:6). Practical wisdom teaches: diversify your investments (11:2), sow your seed even when conditions are uncertain (11:6). Work hard, but do not become obsessed.

Wisdom's Enduring but Imperfect Value

More painful to Kohelet than the flaws of wealth are the limitations of wisdom. For Kohelet, wisdom is not only practical—it is personal. That even this cannot secure justice or meaning is the book's deepest sorrow, because wisdom, unlike wealth, is supposed to be an anchor of religious meaning. Wisdom, we are taught, should guide us toward meaning and righteousness. Yet even here, Kohelet finds disappointment. “I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness” (2:13)—yet “the same fate befalls them both” (2:14). The wise are forgotten, their achievements impermanent (9:15). Even a poor wise man who saves a city is ultimately ignored (9:16).

Still, Kohelet insists: wisdom is better than power (9:16), and “wisdom preserves the life of its possessor” (7:12). It is not worthless—it is just not a guarantee. Its value lies not in control, but in the capacity to respond meaningfully to the world's uncertainties.

Living with Complexity: Humility and Joy

Kohelet holds two truths at once: that wisdom and righteousness matter—and that they do not guarantee success. This refusal to resolve contradiction finds resonance in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's theological method. Jewish thought often accepts contradiction—not as a failure of logic, but as a reflection of reality:

Judaism has never accepted the two-value Aristotelian logic which, in its principle of contradiction and the excluded middle, states that, if A contradicts B, then only one of them is right and the other is wrong; the thing is either B or A, to the exclusion of either being both together or being neither A nor B. Judaism has ignored this principle and has quite often acted as if both A and B are right, in spite of their mutual exclusiveness. Even in the halakhic realm, Judaism believes that there is a possibility for a contradiction in the objects without negating either of them. Jewish philosophy and the metaphysics of man can only be understood if the dialectical principle is adopted as the point of departure.^[ii]

Kohelet affirms both the value of wisdom and its limits; both the possibility of joy and the inevitability of death.

Instead of entitlement or nihilism, Kohelet offers humility. We do not earn our portion by merit alone. Our helek (portion) is a gift, and we are meant to enjoy it—with awe before God and within bounds of morality (9:7–10; 11:9). “Rejoice, young man, in your youth... but know that for all these, God will bring you into judgment” (11:9). Joy is not a distraction from righteousness, but a fulfillment of it.

Kohelet concludes: “The end of the matter, when all is heard: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man” (12:13). Not because doing so guarantees success, but because it is what we were created for.

In a world where justice is deferred, where wisdom is fallible, and where wealth is fleeting, Kohelet offers a theology of realism: work honestly, pursue wisdom, enjoy life as a divine gift—and trust that God’s judgment encompasses more than we can see. This is not cynicism, but sanctified clarity. Wisdom and wealth may not ensure success—but Kohelet teaches us to live wisely and gratefully anyway.

Kohelet does not promise certainty. He offers instead a life of disciplined joy, grounded effort, and humble fear of God.

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Korach -- A Good “Machlokes”

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2015

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

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

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

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

I believe the secret lies in a Mishnah in Yevamos (13b) which states: Adherents of the House of Hillel did not refrain from borrowing pots from adherents of the House of Shamai, even though the rulings of one group might be considered not kosher to the other group. The reason they did not refrain, explains Rashi, is because the two groups respected each other.

They would never feed anything to a member of the other group which he considered incorrect to eat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Note: I did not receive a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Rhine this week, so I am running one from his archives.

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

* 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.

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Korach – The Price of Character

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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

The Ramba"n notes that the Torah does not mention Aharon's reaction. He explains that this is because Aharon had no reaction. Due to Aharon's great humility and his ethical and holy nature he did not respond in any way during Korach's

rebellion. He remained silent throughout, as if he agreed that Korach was greater than him and he was only following Moshe's orders to be the Kohein Gadol. (Bamidbar 16:4)

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

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

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

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

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

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. The RI Torah Network included this Dvar Torah in a booklet for Shavuot 5786. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Korach

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

One of the risks that our faithful shepherd Moshe took when he finally accepted God's offer to be the redeemer of Israel was having his life displayed for all like an open book. We see him fighting for justice, with the taskmaster, with the shepherds of Midian, and even with God. He launches fiery speeches in favor of his nation, but he also gets frustrated with them, announcing that he is not the mother or father of the stubborn Israelites. He negotiates God's wrath after the sin of the Golden Calf, but on his own administers a punishment to the sinners. Yet with all the versatility of Moshe's character, with all of his passion, deep faith, and sensitivity, we never find him personally insulted. Even when his own siblings turn

against him and Miriam contracts leprosy as a punishment, Moshe does not rebuke her and instead prays for her speedy recovery.

When confronted by Korah and his followers, however, all that seems to change. Moshe engages in a long tirade against the dissenters and requests for them a unique punishment. He asks God to create a miraculous phenomenon in order to prove Moshe's righteousness:

With this you shall know that God sent to carry out all these actions and that I did not invent them. If they die as all humans and the destiny of all men befalls them, God did not send me. But if God creates a new creation, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, you shall know that these people blasphemed God.

We read in wonder. Is it possible that Moshe was patient only when God's word was on the line but loses his temper when it comes to his personal honor, or when his position is threatened.

To answer this question, we have to go back several verses, and look at Moshe's response to Korah when the latter claims that the whole congregation is holy:

Take your incense pans, you and your followers and stand in front of God tomorrow... the man chosen by God is the holy one...

This suggestion was a carefully planned test of Korah's integrity. Had Korah genuinely meant what he said and truly believed that there is no room for hierarchy in a "holy Congregation," he should have immediately rejected the offer: "*Did you not hear what I just say? We are ALL holy. I will not be involved in another process of religious elections.*" That was the response Moshe expected, and when it did not come, he knew that Korah was a hypocrite and an opportunist.

Moshe made one more attempt and reached out to the lay leaders of the rebellion, Datan and Aviram, but they have replied defiantly:

We will not come to you! Is it not enough that you brought us out of the land of milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you now seek to control us? You also failed to bring us to the land of milk and honey and give us possession of fields and vineyards. Do you want to gouge our eyes? We shall not come [to you or to the land.]

Datan and Aviram seem to cruelly hit Moshe where it hurts him most. They mention his failure to bring them to the Promised Land, following the regrettable mission of the scouts, and they repeat the first insult leveled at him after he killed the taskmaster – all you want is to control us!

Beneath the tough talk, however, something else is lurking – a hidden message and an invitation to negotiate. By saying that Moshe did not give them fields and vineyards, Datan and Aviram are offering a deal. They insinuate that if Moshe can guarantee them a significant portion in their future land, they will call off the rebellion. The shameless response of Datan and Aviram reaffirmed Moshe's feeling that the demand of Korah and his followers for equality was hypocritical. The dissenters shrewdly used the frustration of the people to stage a mutiny against Moshe, but they were not concerned with the welfare of the people. Rather, they saw this as an opportunity to usurp power, and ultimately, to exploit the people. That understanding of Moshe explains the way he addresses God, as mentioned above:

If they die as all humans and the destiny of all men befalls them, God did not send me.

The emphasis is on the word "all." Moshe rebukes the rebels for pretending that they are like "all" others. Their gathering with incense-loaded pans, in wait for a divine sign which will appoint one of them as the supreme leader, exposes their lies and hypocrisy and shows that they are power-thirsty. Accordingly, Moshe demands a punishment which befits injustice. In the biblical world of idioms and images, the land opens its mouth to cover wrongdoing. It swallows the blood of the first

murder victim (Gen. 4:11), it covers the blood of wild animals and fowl which ideally should not have been killed (Lev. 17:13), and it is addressed by Job (16:18) who asks it not to cover the injustice brought upon him by God.

The rebels of Korah committed the ultimate act of injustice towards their presumptive constituents. They were willing to unsettle a divinely mandated government, risking the welfare of the people, in order to grab power and riches. Not only that, they did so in the name of public service. The pages of mankind's history are unfortunately filled with the names and deeds of many such despots and corrupt rulers who destroyed nations and countries for their self-aggrandizement, the likes of Mao and Hitler, Stalin and Arafat, to mention but a few from recent history.

The earth, which usually is accused of covertly participating in concealing the blood of innocent victims, is granted permission this time to swallow Korah and his followers publicly. This miraculous phenomenon shows that indeed justice is served, because the rebels are the perpetrators of crimes against the rest of the congregation, which naively believed in them as its saviors.

The authors of the Midrash delivered one final blow to the Korah gang by creating a fantastic story around the disappearance of the third accomplice, Ohn, son of Pelet. Mr. Ben Pelet appears in the short list of Korah's followers but is not included in the final and fateful gathering, suggesting that he might have not been there. The rabbis say that his wife dissuaded him from joining the anti-Moshe movement by saying that he will reap no benefits and will only be punished. Ohn ben Pelet responded that he already gave his word that he would join the others, but his wife asked him to stay in the tent while she takes care of things. She sat at the entrance, let her hair down, and started applying fragrant oil. When the people of Korah came to pick up her husband they turned back empty handed because they did not want to get near an *"immodest woman."*

Over the years, this Midrash has been misinterpreted as saying that a woman must cover her hair. As a matter of fact, the rabbis identified the concept of hypocrisy in Korah's story and added a layer of their own by leveling criticism against their own generation's hypocrites. The Mishnah in Sotah (3:4) speaks of dangerous pious people, and the Talmud (22:2) explains that one of them is the one who shuts his eyes to not look at women. The rabbis spun this story into a tale of people who pretend that they are so religious as to not go near Ohn's wife, while in reality they are defying not only Moshe's prophecy but the Divine Word as well.

In conclusion, the story of Korah is relevant to all societies and all eras. It calls on us to scrutinize our motives when we launch a campaign for justice, and to study the behavior and messages of lay and religious leaders in order to determine if they are serving a noble cause or are nothing more than a self-serving fraudulent actors.

Shabbat Shalom

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

* 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). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

This week we read about one of the greatest political disputes in the Torah. Korach challenges the authority of Moshe and

Aharon, and in response, Hashem intervenes: the earth opens and swallows Korach and his followers.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot discusses this conflict and teaches:

"What is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his followers. And what is a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai."

Interestingly, the Mishnah does not describe the conflict as one between Korach and Moshe, but rather between Korach and his followers. Our sages explain that Korach was not arguing for the sake of truth, for the benefit of the nation, or for the honor of Hashem. His dispute was driven by personal ambition and self-promotion.

In contrast, Hillel and Shammai often disagreed, yet they always treated one another with respect and remained committed to the pursuit of truth. Their disagreements were motivated by a sincere desire to understand and fulfill Hashem's will.

This Mishnah and this parashah teach us a priceless lesson. Disagreement is a powerful tool and has been an essential part of Jewish life throughout history. It has the power to build a brighter future or to swallow us whole.

The question is: What is our goal? Are we arguing for the sake of Hashem or for the sake of ourselves? Are we pursuing truth, or are we simply trying to hear our own voice and defend a position?

In every boardroom, every community, every government, and every society, there will always be differing opinions. The challenge is to recognize the difference between a constructive disagreement and a destructive one. We must strive to live lives of truth, engaging in discussions **leshem shamayim** for the sake of Heaven.

B'Ahavat Yisrael
Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher>.

Rav Kook Torah

Korach: Holiness in the Midst of the Community

The Need For a Minyan

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 eidaḥ (community)" (Num. 16:20). From here, the Sages concluded that God is sanctified within an eidaḥ.

And what is the definition of eidaḥ? The Torah refers to the ten spies who brought a negative report of the Land of Israel as an eidaḥ 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.

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/korach60>

Korach: Hierarchy and Politics: The Never-Ending Story (5776, 5783)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi *

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

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

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

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

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

Korach was a graduate of the same Machiavellian school of politics. He understood the three ground rules. First you have to be a populist. Play on people's discontents and make it seem as if you are on their side against the current leader. "You have gone too far!" he said to Moses and Aaron. "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Num. 16:3).

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

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

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

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

The comparison between human and chimpanzee politics is not meant lightly. Judaism has long understood that Homo sapiens is a mix of what the Zohar calls nefesh habehamit and nefesh haElokit, the animal soul and the Godly soul. We are not disembodied minds. We have physical desires and these are encoded in our genes. Scientists speak today about three systems: the “reptile” brain that produces the most primal fight-or-flight responses, the “monkey” brain that is social, emotional, and sensitive to hierarchy, and the human brain, the prefrontal cortex, that is slow, reflective and capable of thinking through consequences of alternative courses of action. This confirms what Jews and others - Plato and Aristotle among them - have long known. It is in the tension and interplay between these systems that the drama of human freedom is played out.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Footnotes:

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

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

[3] Bereishit Rabbah 55:8.

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

[5] Following the Brexit vote, the question is being asked in Britain as to whether the United Kingdom will remain a united kingdom.

[6] Michael Dobbs, *House of Cards* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).

[7] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), pt. 1, ch. 11.

[8] Baba Batra 21a.

[9] Meaning, both views are correct, see Eruvin 13b; Gittin 6b

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 normally select an earlier Devar.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/hierarchy-politics-never-ending-story/>

Parshah for the Anxious: You Will Not Drown

By Eliezer Shemtov * © Chabad

There is a song in Yiddish, Fort a Yidele in a Shiffele, that describes a desperate situation and the limited options available:

A Jew sails on a little boat,
The boat breaks and he is drowning,
He cries: "Tatenyu! (Dear Father!) Save me! Save me!"
"I cannot help you. I cannot help you."

A Jew sails on a little boat,
The boat breaks and he is drowning,
He cries: "Mamenyu! (Dear Mother!) Save me! Save me!"
"I cannot help you. I cannot help you."

A Jew sails on a little boat,
The boat breaks and he is sinking,
He cries: "Rebenyu! (Dear Rebbe!) Save me! Save me!"

"You will not drown! You will not drown!"

What is the song's message, and what does it have to do with this week's Torah portion, Korach?

The song highlights one of the roles of a Rebbe: showing a person that they can, even when they themselves have given up.

Where does that power come from? How can a Rebbe say "*you can*" when the person and their own parents have already surrendered?

The answer lies in a Rebbe's singular clarity of perspective, and specifically his vision of human potential. He doesn't only see it; he enables others to see it too. And not only to see it, but to activate it, act accordingly, and emerge victorious.

In this week's Torah portion, we encounter exactly this scenario. Korach was not content with Moses' and Aaron's authority. "*All of the congregation is holy, and G d is among them,*" argued Korach and his 250 followers. "*Why then do Moses and Aaron elevate themselves above the community of G d?*"¹

The outcome was that G d intervened decisively, affirming Moses as leader and confirming that everything he had instituted was by Divine command.

From a Chassidic perspective, the dispute was not simply about authority in general, but about the specific kind of authority Moses represented.

The authority of any ordinary leader derives from those being led, as Uruguay's patriot General José Gervasio Artigas so eloquently expressed: "My authority comes from you, and it ends in the presence of your sovereign will." The people choose the leader they believe can best help them achieve their goals; the leader serves the people.

Moses' authority was of an entirely different nature. It came from G d and was therefore independent of the will of the people. It was not defined by popular vote or personal preference. It was not about leading the people where they wanted to go, but where they needed to go.

If one believes the universe is the product of cosmic accident and one's own existence the product of biological chance, the only truth is personal truth: what one wants, and who can help obtain and defend it. But if one proceeds from the belief that all of existence is the result of Divine design and creation, then what matters most is knowing what the Creator wants—in general, and of each of us specifically.

From that perspective, personal truth must yield to His truth. And to know what His truth is, one must turn to someone with the qualifications to know it — chief among which is having genuinely subordinated their own will to G d's.

The tool for this week: It is not enough to admire the Rebbe's personal virtues. We can and must use the opportunity each of us has to bring greater clarity into our own personal lives by accessing and nourishing ourselves from his teachings. You will not drown.

[Ed. note: this Dvar Torah is especially relevant today, 3 Tammuz 5786, the day I am preparing this issue, because it is the 32nd yahrzeit of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, the Lubavitch Rebbe of blessed memory.]

FOOTNOTE:

1. Numbers 16:3.

* Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Korach: Miraculously Natural

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

[Ed. note: I am preparing this issue of Devrei Torah on 3 Tammuz 5786, corresponding to June 18, 2026, the 32nd yahrzeit of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, the Lubavitch Rebbe of blessed memory.]

In order to demonstrate conclusively that He Himself had set apart the tribe of Levi from the rest of the people, G-d told Moses to take the staffs of the princes of each of the 12 tribes and place them next to the Ark in the inner chamber of the Tabernacle.

Moses did so, and Aaron's staff miraculously sprouted almonds overnight, whereas the other staffs remained unchanged.

On the following day, Moses came into the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed. It gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds. (Num. 17:23)

Even though the fact that Aaron's staff produced almonds overnight was an overt miracle, the natural process of flowering and fruiting was followed. This is because a miracle is more miraculous when it permeates the non-miraculous processes of nature.

A lesson here for us is that in performing our own "miracles," i.e., in fulfilling our mission of revealing the Divine purpose behind creation, we should indeed act with the greatest alacrity (just as Aaron's staff produced fruit miraculously quickly), but at the same time take care to follow the natural steps involved in achieving our goal. This will ensure that we reveal Divinity in all aspects of mundane life, even those that appear to function "by themselves," i.e., according to the orderly processes of nature..

– From *Daily Wisdom* *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

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Volume 32, Issue 34

Shabbat Parashat Korach

5786 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Leader as Servant

"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)

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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?

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Holiness Must Be Achieved

“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;

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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 mezuzah, 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 mezuzah (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 mezuzah 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.

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

An End to Envy

I’ll share you with a rather extreme statement by an insightful, albeit unusual, rabbinic thinker of the early twentieth century, Rabbi Aharon Shmuel Tameres, in a book he published in Warsaw, 1920. He wrote:

“Briefly stated, war is the idolatry of modernity, which, as it progressed intellectually, retained war as a remnant from all other foolish idolatries.”

Harsh words, but words which command our attention.

Allow me to soften the message significantly with an anecdote that I’ve come to cherish. It is an anecdote I was privileged to hear from several eyewitnesses, all Holocaust survivors.

They were all young yeshiva students at the time, in the months immediately after Hitler’s invasion of Poland in late 1939. The Modzitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shaul Yedidiah Elazar Taub, had the foresight to immediately flee his home and Chassidic court in Poland. He convinced several others to join him, among them some of his family, including some of his children (including my dear father-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Taub).

The group escaped Poland, avoiding Nazi airplanes flying overhead and setting fire from the air to Jewish homes and synagogues. They made their way into Lithuania, then safe, and spent time in Litvishe towns, including Kovno, and eventually Vilna.

There, with the encouragement of the de facto leader of the community, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, he was able to find refuge for

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himself and his entourage, and to conduct Chassidic services, including a *tisch*, or informal Shabbat festive meal, attended by the local yeshiva students, of whom many were themselves refugees.

The custom at such events was for the Rebbe to distribute small portions of his food to all in attendance. These small servings were symbolic “leftovers” from the Rebbe’s own serving. In Yiddish, “leftovers” are called “*shirayim*”.

The young students, who enjoyed the Rebbe’s songs and melodies and who were hypnotized by his brief but brilliant Torah sermons, were, to say the least, unaccustomed to eating the leftovers/*shirayim* from the rebbe’s plate. Many of them declined the honor, and many laughed scoffingly at this “primitive” custom.

The Rebbe calmed them down and gently explained: “*Shirayim* are not a laughing matter. They teach an important lesson. Had Hitler learned that lesson, I would not be here today. I would still be at home with my Chassidim in Poland.”

“For,” he continued, “*shirayim* teach us the lesson of not wanting everything for oneself, of leaving something over for the other person. Imagine if Hitler had kept to his own domain and left the rest of us to our own countries.”

He then continued, or so I was told, with a longer explanation of *kin’ah*, envy. First, he defined envy as desiring an object that belongs to another, of not being satisfied with one’s own possessions, but longing and plotting to obtain it from one’s fellow one way or another. That is *kin’ah*.

In that context, he quoted two verses, one biblical and the other Mishnaic:

“...For love is as powerful as death itself, and envy [*kin’ah*] as unyielding as She’ol (the netherworld). (Song of Songs/Shir HaShirim 8:6)

“Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: ‘Envy [*kin’ah*], lust, and the seeking of honor drive a person out of the world.’” (Ethics of the Fathers/Pirkei Avot 4:28)

I know not how the Rebbe expounded those powerful condemnations of envy, *kin’ah*. But I do know of quite a few biblical and historical characters who were envious and for whom envy/*kin’ah* was their downfall.

One was the central character of this week’s Torah portion after whom the parsha is named—Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32).

Korach was the epitome of a man who had everything. Tradition has it that he was very

wealthy. He had a wife and family, sons who went on to future honor after their father met his wretched fate. As a member of the tribe of Levi, he had opportunities for leadership and even for the performance of sacred functions.

Yet he was envious of Moshe and Aharon and persuaded others to become sufficiently envious to join him in his ill-fated and blasphemous rebellion.

It is noteworthy that, as pointed out by the author of Tosefet Yom Tov, there is a passage in a commentary attributed to Rashi in which Korach is designated as the very archetype of envy, as the exemplary of the nasty trait of kin'ah!

How does one overcome envy? One very creative and psychologically astute approach is offered by Rabbi Baruch Epstein, the early twentieth century author of Torah Temimah, in his commentary to the verse in Shir HaShirim quoted above.

There, love is described as very powerful and envy as ultimately disastrous. Rabbi Epstein sees this connection in the text: When two individuals truly love each other, they will never envy each other. The more love, the less envy.

I recommend that the reader consult Rabbi Epstein's own words and his examples in his commentary found after the Pentateuch section of Chumash Vayikra.

Allow me to express a bit of my own limited creativity. In an attempt to find some themes common to last week's parsha, Shelach, and this week's Korach, I recalled that last week the Torah reading concluded with the mitzvah of tzitzit, fringes to be tied onto the corners of one's four-cornered garment. Among those fringes was to be attached tekhelet, a cord of blue.

What immediately came to my mind was that Korach is said to have mocked Moshe with silly halachic questions, one of which was whether an entire garment composed of tekhelet, blue material, would require blue fringes.

Apparently, Korach's psyche, suffused with envy, could not be satisfied with just a few strands of blue cords. He was after much more. Entire garments of blue would not quench his thirst for it all. Envy does not allow one to be satisfied with only a sample of totality. The envious person wants it all.

But I have another connection to tekhelet, besides the fact that I've carefully included blue cords in my own personal tallitot for

many years. That is the Talmudic passage which reads:

"Why blue rather than any of the other colors? Because blue calls to mind the color of the sea, and the sea is the color of the heavens, and the heavens resemble the Lord's Throne of Glory, of which it is said (Exodus 24:10): '...and beneath His feet what looked like a lapis lazuli pavement as clear as the sky itself.'" (Talmud Bavli Menachot 44b)

Just a strand or two of the blue cords of tekhelet coupled with a dose of inner reflection and spirited imagination brings us, step by step, away from our self-centered envy toward the "feet" of the Master of the Universe.

But envy? Not blue. William Shakespeare knew well that green is the color of envy. In the play Othello, Iago warns Othello about the dangers of envy calling envy a "green-eyed monster"!

Be not green with envy. Blue tekhelet conquers green envy at every turn.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **"Fake News" Is Not a Modern-Day** **Invention**

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).

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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 mezuzah 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.

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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?”

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

A “Reasonable” Question Asked

Unreasonably -Rabbanit Rivky Krestt

What was Korach's crime? At first glance, Korach's challenge to Moshe and Aharon seems almost democratic: “For the entire assembly – all of them – are holy, and the Lord is among them; why do you elevate yourselves above the Lord's congregation?” In our modern era of questioning authority and demanding transparency, Korach's words could sound like a reasonable reformer seeking justice.

But the Mishna presents Korach as the classic example of destructive controversy – מחלוקת שאינה לשם שמים (Avot 5:17). What turned a potentially legitimate question into a catastrophic rebellion that literally swallowed its participants whole?

The Right Question, Wrong Method The key isn't in what Korach asked, but in how he asked it. Compare Korach's approach to that of the daughters of Tzlofchad (Bamidbar 27), who also questioned an established law. The Talmud praises them as being “wise, interpreters of verses, and righteous,” noting that “they spoke in accordance with the moment” – they presented their case at just the right time (Bava Batra 119b). They went to Moshe directly, privately, and with genuine humility, seeking understanding rather than trying to undermine authority. When Moshe didn't have an immediate answer, he consulted Hashem – and their question led to a positive change in Jewish law.

Korach, by contrast, staged a public spectacle. As Rashi explains, citing the Midrash Tanchuma, he gathered 250 men and mockingly asked Moshe whether garments made entirely of blue wool would require tzitzit – turning sacred law into street theater designed to humiliate rather than illuminate (Tanchuma Korach 2).

Moshe's response reveals the deeper issue. Rather than defending his authority, he immediately deflects: “Therefore, you and your entire assembly who are gathering are against the Lord, for what is Aharon that you should

complain against him?” (Bamidbar 16:11). Moshe understood that legitimate leadership comes from divine mandate, not personal ambition.

The Hidden Villains - But here's where we must read carefully. Buried within Korach's rebellion are two figures whose presence seems almost incidental: Datan and Aviram. The Torah could have told Korach's story without them – so why are they here?

The Midrash gives us a crucial clue: these are the same two men who were fighting in Egypt when Moshe first tried to intervene (Shemot 2:13-14), responding to his peace-making efforts with shocking insolence: “Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us?” They were chronic troublemakers, consistent opponents of Moshe's leadership from day one.

The most telling detail comes in Moshe's different approaches to each faction – and their vastly different responses. With Korach and his 250 followers, Moshe engages directly, proposing the incense test that would let Hashem decide the matter. But when Moshe sends for Datan and Aviram, they refuse to come entirely, replying: “We will not go up! Is it not enough that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that you would also lord over us?”

The Torah tells us that Moshe was deeply distressed by their refusal to engage. As the Tanhuma explains, their unwillingness to enter dialogue and clarify the dispute was particularly painful to Moshe – because healthy controversy requires good faith engagement from all parties.

The Or HaChayim provides the key insight: והגם שנקהלו היהודים על משה ועל אהרן היו חוזרים בהם אם לא היו ב' הרשעים הם היו סיבה למאורע מתחילה ועד סוף – “We learned that even though the Jews gathered against Moshe and Aharon, they would have returned if not for these two wicked men... they were the cause of the incident from beginning to end.” Datan and Aviram weren't just participants in Korach's rebellion – they were its cynical architects, using Korach's legitimate frustrations for their own destructive ends.

Two Models of Questioning Authority - This teaches us something profound about the nature of constructive versus destructive criticism. The difference between מחלוקת לשם שמים (disagreement for the sake of heaven) and its opposite isn't always obvious from the surface.

Hillel and Shammai disagreed constantly, sometimes with tremendous passion. But the

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Talmud tells us they maintained “love and friendship” toward each other, and that Hillel's school would always present Shammai's position first before their own (Eruvin 13b, Yevamot 14b). Their goal was truth, not victory.

Korach's rebellion, by contrast, was driven by something else entirely. While Korach himself may have had genuine concerns about fairness and access to holiness, his movement was hijacked by those whose goal wasn't reform but destruction of legitimate authority altogether.

The Leadership Lesson - This story carries urgent relevance for our time. In an era of social media and viral controversies, the distinction between constructive criticism and destructive cynicism becomes crucial. Korach asked a reasonable question – why should some have privileged access to the divine when all Israel is holy? But he allowed his legitimate concerns to be weaponized by those whose agenda was purely destructive. The tragedy wasn't his question, but his method and his allies.

Conclusion: The Art of Sacred Dissent - Judaism is fundamentally a questioning faith. The daughters of Tzlofchad questioned Moshe and changed Jewish law. Korach questioned Moshe and was swallowed by the earth. The difference wasn't in their right to question, but in how they chose to exercise that right.

In our own communities and institutions, we'll inevitably face moments when authority must be questioned, and systems must be reformed. The story of Korach reminds us that the method matters as much as the message. Are we seeking truth or seeking power? Are we building up or tearing down? Are we motivated by love for our community or by personal grievance?

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wisely taught: “It is easy to be a critic, but the only effective critics are those who truly love – and show they love – those whom they criticize” (Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible). The choice between becoming a Korach or a daughter of Tzlofchad remains ours to make.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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

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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.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

This week’s parasha introduces Korach – the Torah’s first anarchist – who challenged Moshe’s authority by claiming that “all the people are holy.” But what he presented as a fight for justice was, in truth, a dangerous rejection of responsibility, leadership and the structures that hold society together.

From Noam Chomsky to modern protest movements, the idea that all authority is inherently illegitimate has become increasingly seductive. But without legitimate governance, the Torah warns, society descends into chaos. As Pirkei Avot teaches: “Without fear of authority, people would swallow one another alive.”

We must be vigilant not only against tyranny, but against the tyranny of anarchy. May we learn from Korach not what to imitate – but what to avoid. *[Excerpted]*

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

Korach Took - The Heat

They assembled against Moshe and Aaron, and said to them, “You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and HASHEM is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above HASHEM’s assembly?” (Bamidbar 16:3)

You take too much upon yourselves. You took by far too much greatness for yourselves. – Rashi

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

you have taken too much upon yourselves. You have taken too great a task upon yourselves, to rebel against the Holy One, blessed is He. – Rashi

It's quite curious that Moshe feeds Korach a dose of his own words, "you have taken too much upon yourselves". Korach was convinced, and convinced many others too, that Moshe on his own decided to place Aaron, his brother, as the Kohen Gadol. It seemed to Korach an obvious case of nepotism. The truth however, is that Korach wanted that position for himself. He had so much already. He was near to the very top. Yet, still, he wanted to be the top of the top himself. Moshe saw through everything!

There's a classic cartoon that depicts in the first frame two psychiatrists approaching each other and they are each saying to the other, "Good morning!" In the second frame, they have passed each other already, and the thought bubbles on each of their heads read, "I wonder what he meant by that."

Two men were feuding ferociously and another gentleman came between them to broker peace. He asked them to face one another and be prepared to shake hands and make up. As one was about to extend his hand he said to the other fellow, "I'll make up with you, if you make up with me." The other fellow got all riled up and angrily declared, "There you go starting up again!"

Moshe realized that Korach was imputing his motive. The reality was that Korach was the one who had the selfish and ulterior motive here. Whatever he was accusing Moshe of was more-true about himself.

In psychology they call it "projection". Life is a self-portrait. Our picture life is not entirely objective but rather very subjective. We see in others and many situations what resides within ourselves. The Talmud states it succinctly, "Kol HaPosel, B'Mumo Posel" – "Anyone who discovers fault, it his own fault he discovers".

The Baal Shem Tov had similarly pointed out that what we find most distasteful in others is our own unfinished business. The famous psychologist Carl Jung said "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."

I have come to the conclusion after these many years that the Mitzvah of "V'Ahavta L'Re'echa K'mocha" – "Love your neighbor as yourself" is not only a Mitzvah but a fact of life. We can only love someone else to the extent that we love ourselves.

One clever Rabbi said, "If someone doesn't love himself, I don't want him loving me!"

Another teacher told us, "Don't forget that when you point a finger at someone else, you have three fingers pointing back at you!"

Korach's accusation assumed that Moshe was selfish and ambitious and his decisions were influenced by personal biases. The real truth was that this was a clear description of Korach's inner world. He had ambitions, agendas, and self-serving designs. Therefore, Moshe saw right through this and he fed back to Korach his very own words, "you have taken too much upon yourselves".

In psychology and in business we have to figure out who owns the problem. It's like the game Hot Potato. Korach tossed it to Moshe. Moshe gave it back to Korach. Korach cooked it up in his head, and so Korach took – the heat.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Reenacting an Old Drama

The rebellion of Korah and his co-conspirators against Moses and Aaron, of which we read this morning, is the first great, direct test of the leadership of Moses. The quelling of the rebellion of this band of malcontents reestablished and reaffirmed the leadership of Moses of his people in the desert.

And yet, according to Yalkut Reuveni, the Sages of the Kabbala taught that this great battle between Moses and Korah had ancient roots. The struggle between these two, they say, was merely the re-enactment of the old drama of the strife between Cain and Abel. They identify Moses with Abel and Korah with Cain.

The detailed kabbalistic analogy is beyond our limited comprehension. Nevertheless, it is obvious to all of us that the Sages of the Kabbala have here enunciated a great truth. For indeed, as we analyze the two dramas, we find confirmed the similarities between these two sets of biblical characters.

Thus, for instance, we can detect at least three elements which unite Moses with Abel and Korah with Cain. The first of these is kina – jealousy or envy. The fratricide committed by Cain against Abel had its roots in Cain's envy of Abel – the Lord accepted the offering of Abel, but did not accept the offering of Cain. The same feelings provoked Korah to his abortive insurrection. Both Moses and Korah were brothers in the sense of being members of the same tribe of Levi. Yet Moses was the undisputed leader of the people, while Korah was not. He was consumed by the fires of jealousy – even as later he was consumed by the fires of the Lord when he met his end.

The second observable element that unites these two pairs is ta'ava – concupiscence, desire, a ravenous appetite for more and more. In the story of the sons of Adam, the Sages tell us that they divided the world between the two of them. Cain owned a full half of the world – yet he begrudged his brother the other half and desired it for himself. Korah, according to Jewish tradition, was exceedingly wealthy, so much so that "as rich

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as Korah" has become a byword in Yiddish. Yet Korah was not satisfied with his wealth, and instead he was overwhelmed by a ta'ava for political power as well.

A third similarity is the striving for kavod, for honor and recognition. More than envy or desire motivated Cain to his tragic act. He was, in addition, the older brother of Abel – and he regarded Abel's distinction as an insult and an offense against his position. He did not receive the kavod he thought was his due. So, Korah felt deeply unhappy because of the lack of recognition he felt he deserved. He wanted kavod, and did not receive all that he expected. How clearly this comes out in the first accusation that Korah publicly directs against Moses in his denunciation, "Wherefore do you presume to raise yourselves over the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3).

The Abels and the Moseses, the people of good will, must always be prepared to cope with the malcontents, the dissatisfied, those who always grasp for more than they deserve. As the Rabbis taught us in Avot (4:21), "Envy, desire, and undeserved honor drive a man out of the world." This was literally true in both our cases. Cain was forced out of his world – he was sent into exile, to wander over the face of the earth. No place could he call his own, no house could he identify as his home. Korah too was driven out of the world – indeed, he literally was swallowed up by the earth and vanished from the world of men.

The quarrel between Moses and Korah was not something localized in ancient history – it is a universal drama, as old as man himself. So long as there will be people who will allow themselves to be dominated by unworthy aspirations, someone is going to be terrorized and victimized. The two cases of Cain and Korah are, in essence, a biblical insight into the personality of the aggressor.

Yet there is one question that remains to be answered. If indeed the story of Korah and Moses is but the reenactment of the old drama of Cain and Abel, why are the results so different? Why is it that Abel was the victim of Cain in that ancient story, while the man identified with Abel, Moses, is the victor over Cain's representative, Korah? Why does the good lose in one case, and triumph in the other?

Before we answer that question, we must find yet one more similarity between these two couples. And that lies in the element of disguise, of cloaking evil in piety. The most characteristic element in both stories is the projection of selfish, egotistical, aggressive intentions in the guise of the noble, the good, the decent. For his own nefarious purposes, the devil will quote scripture, and the aggressor nation will announce itself "leader of the peace-loving camp." Thus, Cain's motivations were, as we have seen, completely selfish in nature. Yet, Cain did not announce his intentions as boldly as all that. Tradition teaches (Genesis Rabba 22:7) that Cain and Abel divided the world in the following manner: Abel was to receive all chattel, or moveable objects, while Cain was to possess all land, all real estate. Therefore, Cain decided to press his claims in the form of justice and righteousness. Wherever Abel went, Cain told him, "You are standing on my

land. Please move on. If you continue to trespass I shall protect my rights against you.” From a formal, conventional point of view, Cain was apparently within his rights. He had justice on his side. If that was the agreement between the two brothers, Cain had the right to insist upon its complete execution – so his kina and ta’ava and kavod were all wrapped up in the cloak of legalism, piety, righteousness.

Korah, according to the Bible and Rabbis, did the very same thing. He did not call a press conference and announce that he was going to initiate a coup d’état in order to satisfy his ambition for greater power and influence. He did turn his eyes heavenward and act as the protector of a true demagogue, he denounced Moses and Aaron saying, “Have you not taken enough power for yourselves? Do you not realize that all these people are holy, that not only the two of you are holy?” He set himself up as the great democrat, defender of the people. Jewish tradition further records that Korah tried to make Moses and Aaron appear as tyrants who needlessly exploited the people for their personal gain and profit. He cast himself in the role of the advocate of the ordinary, common man against the tyranny of Moses.

So both in the case of Cain and Korah, the real motives of envy, desire for power, and the grasping for honor, are disguised in a veneer of righteousness. They are hypocrites.

Perhaps this is the reason we find in both these stories a strange grammatical construction – a verb without an object. In the story of Cain and Abel we read: “And Cain said to his brother Abel, and it was when they were in the field that Cain rose and killed his brother Abel” (Genesis 4:8). What did he “say”? We read that he said something, but we do not read what he said. So too, in today’s sidra we read: “Korah and the people who were conspiring with him, took...and they rose up and rebelled against Moses” (Numbers 16:1). But what or whom did they “take”? We are not told.

Perhaps what the Torah means to tell us with these unusual constructions is that the reasons they gave, what they said, the “front” they presented, the excuses they offered – were all empty, meaningless, and of no concern to us. What Cain said was totally irrelevant – he never said what he really meant. The fact is that he was fraudulent and hypocritical. What Korah said or whom he took along with him was equally inconsequential – the important thing is that in order to satisfy his own desire for power he deceived and almost destroyed his entire people. It is the action, the deeper motive, unspoken and unarticulated, but disguised in the cloak of piety, that is so terribly and unspeakably evil. It is that which really counts. The rest is unworthy of being recorded in Scripture.

Here, then, we can discover why Moses was the victor, while Abel was the victim of his aggressive brother. In all our readings of the Torah and our midrash we do not find that Abel truly fought back against Cain. We do not find him calling Cain’s bluff. Instead, in all likelihood, he tried to counter his brother Cain on his terms. No doubt he rebutted his arguments with legal arguments of his own. And when you try to fight

the devil on the devil’s terms, you are bound to lose.

But Moses had learned the lesson of Abel. He refused to discuss Korah’s complaints in the manner they were presented. Instead he pierced the mask, he went straight to the heart of the matter, and ripped off the disguises of these evil men. He said to them (Numbers 16:8-9), “Listen here, you sons of Levi, is it not enough for you that God has chosen your tribe above all others, that you seek as well to become the priests, the sole leaders?” He stripped them of all their pious pretensions and let all the people see what these rebels really wanted – power, power, and more power. And then he turned to the people and said to them, “Depart from the tents of these evil, wicked people.” That is all that they really are. Moses learned from the story of Cain and Abel – and we must learn from the story of Korah and Moses – never to be impressed by pious frauds, for even their piety is fraudulent. Evil should not be debated – it should be exposed.

This is a lesson for us in all aspects of life. In order to survive, physically and morally and spiritually, we must insist upon the truth and look for it with all the power at our command.

In recent years, Jewish writers and “intellectuals” who are very uncomfortable with their Judaism have pronounced publicly on our faith in many ways. Worse yet, certain organizations which should know better have turned to them as the oracles who will decide for us the real nature and future of Judaism. The magazine Commentary started this with a symposium, and the results were sad indeed. Now the American Jewish Congress has instituted a “dialogue” between American and Israeli Jews in Jerusalem. From the most recent reports of The New York Times, the dialogue this week included American writers, novelists, and columnists. All of them, according to the report, were “rather nebulous about their identification as Jews.” One author – whose recent book portrays a rabbi in a role that would make any sensitive reader blush with embarrassment – declared the “essential nature of Jewishness” to be a feeling of alienation, of being in exile, an outsider. Thus, he declared, most Jews in Israel and the United States, being insiders, in their respective societies have “ceased to be Jews.”

What a romantic definition! It certainly sounds appealing. But then, by this definition, King David, King Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna and countless others were not Jews! They were not alienated from their own society. This particular writer is a Jew, but they are not. Furthermore a Jewish society is impossible – for a society cannot be alienated from itself!

Another writer, who recently no doubt made a great deal of money with his “best seller,” declared that to be a Jew one must be a “dissenter from the affluent society.” By such terms, Rabbi Judah the Prince, who according to the reports of our tradition was very wealthy, was not a Jew – although he was the editor of the Mishna!

It is useless to show the emptiness of this dilettantism. It is humiliating to hear Jews alienated from Judaism describe Judaism as a state of being alienated from Jews. It is embarrassing that the American Jewish Congress

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saw fit to invite only one observant Jew – a Professor of Physics from the Hebrew University – to participate in this “dialogue.”

We must learn, and should have learned by now, that all this is a façade. It is an elaborate circumlocution for assimilation – a word no longer popular nowadays. It is a roundabout way for saying, “I desire to commit spiritual suicide but haven’t the courage to face up to it. I would like to forget that I am a Jew, but the cruel world won’t let me. In my heart of hearts I want to be reborn a ‘WASP’ – a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant – but my infantile wishes are constantly frustrated.”

It is a sad but true fact that those who ponder the definition of their Jewishness have usually lost it by that time. The Jew who practices Torah and mitzvot does not normally concern himself about the definition of his Jewishness. It is when an individual has assimilated in fact, but is unwilling to acknowledge it in words, that that person wraps up his assimilation in this existentialist rhetoric of “alienation.”

Our policy ought to be not to discuss “Who is a Jew?” on such terms. We should, rather, recognize assimilation for what it is, call it by its real name, and avoid unnecessary dialectic.

Those of us who are true to the Jewish tradition and loyal to our Torah need not participate in this new fad and fashion on inventing new definitions of Jewishness. Like Moses, we prefer to go straight to the truth. We will not call Judaism “alienation” or “dissent.” We will recognize such terms merely as excuse for assimilation, for the surrender of Torah and mitzvot, which alone constitute Judaism.

It is for good reason that the Aggada (Bava Batra 74a) tells us of Rabba bar Bar Hannah putting his ear to the ground in a spot in the desert pointed out to him by an Arab as the burial place of Korah and his cohorts, and hearing them declare from the bowels of the earth, “Moses is true and his Torah is true.” Our Torah is truth, and our truth is Torah. We shall not become ensnared by the slogans, “images,” and posturing of the Cain’s and Korah’s and others of their ilk. Through our Torah of truth we shall become perceptive. With its wisdom, its insights, and its eternal blessings we shall learn to live our lives in a manner pleasing to God. We shall forever proclaim, through all time and all the world, “Moses is true and his Torah is true.”

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Adopted by Chaim O. Shulman from
Sefer Kol Yaakov, sichos of
Rav Leib Bakst zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Detroit
Korach – **Yerushas HaTorah**

In Parshas Korach, we see how Korach strengthened himself in a machlokes against Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach did not present himself as a person fighting for honor. He came with Torah language, with svaros, and with claims that sounded principled.

His public argument was, במדבר טז ג כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם ה' ומדוע תתנשא, על קהה ה', *the entire assembly is holy, and Hashem is among them, so why do you raise yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?* The words sounded powerful. Klal Yisrael is holy. Hashem is among them. Why, then, should Moshe and Aharon stand above everyone else?

Chazal add that Korach also came with sharp Torah questions. He asked Moshe, טלית שכולה מהו שתהא פטורה מן הציצית, *if a garment is entirely techeiles, is it exempt from tzitzis?* Moshe answered that it is still obligated. Korach mocked this: A whole garment of techeiles cannot exempt itself, but four strings can exempt it? He then asked, בית מלא ספרים מהו שיהא פטור מן המזוזה, *if a house is full of sefarim, is it exempt from mezuzah?* Moshe answered that it is still obligated. Korach again mocked the answer: The whole Torah cannot exempt the house, but the two parshiyos in the mezuzah can exempt it?

Chazal also explain that Korach's deeper motive was jealousy. Moshe had appointed Elitzafan ben Uziel as nasi over the family of Kehas. Korach reasoned: My father's brothers were four. Amram was the oldest, and his two sons, Moshe and Aharon, took the highest positions. Yitzhar was next, and I

am the son of Yitzhar. The next position should have come to me. Instead, Moshe appointed Elitzafan, the son of the youngest brother. Because of this, Korach decided to challenge Moshe and try to undo his authority.

At first glance, then, Korach's machlokes seems simple. It was jealousy dressed up as Torah. But the Mishnah in Avos forces us to look deeper. The Mishnah says, כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים, *every machlokes that is l'shem Shamayim will endure, and every machlokes that is not l'shem Shamayim will not endure*. The Mishnah gives as its examples: לשם שמים זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי, ושאינה לשם שמים זו מחלוקת קרה וכל עדתו, *what is a machlokes that is l'shem Shamayim? The machlokes of Hillel and Shammai. And what is a machlokes that is not l'shem Shamayim? The machlokes of Korach and his assembly*.

This comparison is surprising. The machlokes of Hillel and Shammai was Torah itself. Their disagreements were built on honest reasoning, pure seeking of truth, and proper mesorah. But Korach's machlokes seems like a fight for kavod. What do they have in common?

The answer is that Korach also came with a shittah. His claim was not only personal jealousy. He argued for a different approach to Torah and leadership. Moshe Rabbeinu taught Klal Yisrael in the form of rav and talmid. Torah is received through mesorah, through submission to a rebbe, through accepting that the word of Hashem is given to Klal Yisrael through Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach challenged that entire structure. He said, כל העדה קדשים, *the entire assembly is holy*. If everyone is holy, then everyone can decide, everyone can learn independently, everyone can develop his own svaros without submitting to a rav.

That was the meaning behind the tallis and mezuzah questions. Korach was saying: If the whole garment is techeiles, why should it need tzitzis? If the whole house is full of sefarim, why should it need a mezuzah? And if the whole nation is holy, why should it need Moshe Rabbeinu?

If Korach's shittah had truly been l'shem Shamayim, it might have had some place. The Mishnah implies that what destroyed Korach's machlokes was not merely that he had a question or a svara. The fatal problem was that it was not l'shem Shamayim. Once the heart was crooked, the svara could not endure. The conclusion of Torah is that Torah must be learned through the path of rav and talmid, through mesorah, in the way established by Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Rambam's Question

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1 that Klal Yisrael did not believe in Moshe Rabbeinu because of the miracles he performed. משה רבינו לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה, שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבם דופי. *Klal Yisrael did not believe in Moshe Rabbeinu because of the signs he performed, because one who believes because of signs still has a weakness in his heart, since perhaps the sign was done through trickery or sorcery.*

Rather, the Rambam explains, the miracles Moshe performed were done because they were needed at that moment. When the Egyptians had to be drowned, Moshe split the sea. When Klal Yisrael needed food, he brought down the mann. When they needed water, he split the rock. When Korach and his assembly denied him, the earth swallowed them. But none of these miracles were the basis of our belief in Moshe's nevuah.

So what was the basis? Maamad Har Sinai. At Har Sinai, our own eyes saw and our own ears heard. Our emunah in Moshe did not come from reports, wonders, or proofs. It came from direct collective experience.

But this creates a difficulty. The Torah seems to say clearly that the miracle of Korach was meant to prove that Moshe was sent by Hashem. Moshe says, במדבר טז כה בואת תדעון כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האלה כי לא מלבי, *with this you shall know that Hashem sent me to do all these deeds, for they are not from my own heart*. He continues, לא ה' שלחני, *if these men die like all men, then Hashem did not send me*. And then, אם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אתם וגו' וידעתם כי נאצו האנשים האלה את ה', *but if Hashem creates a new creation and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, then you will know that these men have angered Hashem*.

This seems to say that the earth swallowing Korach was a proof that Moshe was right. How, then, can the Rambam say that even this miracle was not meant as the proof of Moshe's nevuah?

The Purpose of Korach's Punishment

The answer is that the miracle of Korach was not needed to create the basic emunah in Moshe Rabbeinu. That had already been established at Har Sinai. Rather, this miracle was needed for a different reason. It was needed to stop a danger that could spread through Klal Yisrael and through all later generations.

We can see this more clearly by comparing Korach with Miriam. Miriam and Aharon also spoke about Moshe. They said, *במדבר יב ב הרק אך במשה דבר ה'*, *did Hashem speak only with Moshe? Did He not speak with us as well?* They questioned Moshe's separation from his wife. Their argument was that they too were nevi'im, and they had not separated from normal family life. Why, then, did Moshe act differently?

Hashem responded immediately. He called Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, and said, *לא כן עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא*, *not so is My servant Moshe; in My entire house he is faithful*. He then said, *ומדוע לא יראתם לדבר בעבדי במשה*, *why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?* Miriam was punished right away with tzaraas.

Why was Miriam corrected immediately, while Korach was allowed to continue until the earth swallowed him? Miriam's question was not a small matter, yet Hashem stopped it at once. Korach, by contrast, was allowed to gather people, argue, spread his shittah, and draw others after him.

The difference is that Miriam's question was l'shem Shamayim. She did not intend to disgrace Moshe. She made a mistake, but she remained attached to the Shechinah. When a person acts l'shem Shamayim, even if he errs, there is a special shemirah from Shamayim. Hashem helps him return to the proper path. Therefore, Miriam was corrected immediately.

Korach was different. His machlokes was not l'shem Shamayim. His words were Torah words, but his heart was not straight. He had already chosen the path of his own daas, his own agenda, his own kavod. Once a person separates himself from l'shem Shamayim, he loses that special shemirah. He is left to his bechirah. That is the hanhagah of תורה, *free choice is given*. Hashem allows a person to go where he insists on going, even if the path leads to destruction.

This is why the Korach miracle was necessary. It was not to create emunah in Moshe from the beginning. It was to uproot a false shittah that could have continued to influence Klal Yisrael. Korach's claim, *כלם קדשים*, could sound very appealing. It could attract great people. It could pull in roshei yeshivos, leaders, and talmidei chachamim. Therefore, Hashem allowed the matter to reach its full expression, and then showed that this was not a valid path in Torah.

The Protection of L'shem Shamayim

Chazal say in Avos, *כל העוסקים עם הציבור יהיו עוסקים עמהם לשם שמים*, *all those who work with the public should work with them l'shem Shamayim*. Chazal also say, *כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים*, *all your actions should be l'shem Shamayim*. This is not only a high madreigah. It is a protection. When a person acts l'shem Shamayim, the Shechinah remains with him and helps him stay within the proper boundaries.

Chazal say in Pesachim, *לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצות אף על פי שלא לשמה שמתוך*, *a person should always involve himself in Torah and mitzvos even shelo lishmah, because from shelo lishmah he will come to lishmah*. But this does not mean that shelo lishmah is the goal. The goal is lishmah. A person must keep asking Hashem to help him reach the point where his Torah and mitzvos are truly for Heaven.

This is also hinted to in the pasuk *ויקחו לי תרומה*, *they shall take for Me a terumah*. Chazal understand *לי* as *לשמי*, *for My sake*. Torah and avodah must be done with the awareness that a person is standing before Hashem and needs the Shechinah to be with him. Without that, even Torah arguments can become dangerous.

As soon as a person relies only on his own daas, he enters danger. We find this by the meraglim. Hashem said to Moshe, *שלח לך אנשים*, *send for yourself*

men. Rashi explains *לך*, *according to your own understanding*.

Hashem was saying: I am not commanding this. If you want, send them.

Once Klal Yisrael chose to move forward on their own terms, Hashem gave them room to err. They were allowed to follow their own path, and that path led to tragedy.

The same yesod appears by Bilaam. Hashem told him clearly, *במדבר כב יב לא תלך עמהם לא תאור את העם*, *do not go with them; do not curse the nation*. But Bilaam still wanted to go. He told Balak's messengers, *שבו נא בזה גם אתם*, *stay here tonight as well*. He kept pushing, as if asking Hashem not to stop him. Eventually, Hashem let him go. That is the הרשות נתונה. When a person insists on his own will, Heaven may allow him to follow it, even toward his own downfall.

Chazal say in Avodah Zarah that if a man sins with another man's wife, one might think the world should stop and prevent a child from being born. But *עולם כמנהגו נוהג*, *the world continues according to its natural order*, and the sinners will have to answer for what they did. Hashem created a world with bechirah. He does not always interrupt a person's choices, even when those choices lead to terrible results.

This was Korach's downfall. He chose to separate from the guidance of Moshe Rabbeinu and from the protection of l'shem Shamayim. He wrapped his jealousy in holy language. He dressed personal ambition in Torah svara. He spoke about the holiness of the people, but his words were not pure. Therefore, instead of becoming a lasting machlokes like Hillel and Shammai, his machlokes collapsed completely.

The lesson is frightening but clear. Holy words are not enough. Sharp sevaros are not enough. Even claims about kedushah, equality, and truth are not enough. The question is whether the heart behind them is l'shem Shamayim. When Torah is joined with l'shem Shamayim, it becomes part of the mesorah and endures. When Torah language is used for kavod, jealousy, or self-will, it can become the path of Korach.

That is the inheritance of Torah, *ירושת התורה*. Torah is not inherited by those who merely speak its language. It is inherited by those who submit themselves to Hashem, to mesorah, and to the path of rav and talmid established by Moshe Rabbeinu.

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Parshat Korach

Translated and adopted from

Iyunim B'Sefer Bamidbar by Nechama Leibowitz

Part 1 - The Machlokes of Korach and His Group

A Machlokes Made of Many Complaints

The Torah introduces Korach's rebellion with the words: *ויקה קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן* Korach ... took himself together with Dasan and Aviram ... and On ... sons of Reuven (Bamidbar 16:1). The next pasuk adds: *ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים* They rose up before Moshe with 250 men from Bnei Yisrael leaders of the assembly, men of renown (16:2).

Then comes their public claim: *רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם* Enough for you for the entire assembly is holy and Hashem is among them so why do you raise yourselves over the congregation of Hashem (16:3).

At first, the words sound almost noble. Korach speaks in the language of holiness and equality. If *כל העדה כלם קדשים*, the whole assembly is holy, why should Moshe and Aharon hold special positions? Why should one family have leadership and kehuna? Why should any person stand above *קהל השם*, the congregation of Hashem?

But this was not one pure argument. It was a gathering of many resentments. Ibn Ezra explains that Korach's group included רגנים ומתלוננים ומתאוננים, grumblers, complainers, and resentful people of all kinds. Each group had its own grievance. Korach and his Leviim objected to Aharon's kehuna and to the fact that the Leviim served under the kohanim. Dasan and Aviram, from Shevet Reuven, carried the resentment of a tribe that had lost the bechorah, the firstborn status. Others were firstborn men from the tribes, who saw themselves as deprived, because the avodah had been taken from the bechorim after the cheit ha'egel and given to Shevet Levi.

Korach's strength was that he did not need to create anger from nothing. He gathered people who already felt wronged. A Levi felt overlooked. A ben Reuven felt displaced. A bechor felt stripped of his former right. Korach gave all of these private grievances one public slogan: כל העדה כלם קדשים The entire assembly is holy.

That is often how machlokes grows. It does not begin with one clean idea. It brings together different wounds, different jealousies, and different disappointments, and covers them with one attractive phrase.

Korach Chose His Moment

The Ramban explains that the timing of the rebellion was essential. Earlier in the Midbar, no rebellion against Moshe could have succeeded. The people had seen what Moshe had done for them. They trusted him and followed him. The Ramban writes: אילו היה אדם מורד על משה בזמן אחר היו העם סוקלים אותו If a person had rebelled against Moshe at any other time the people would have stoned him. כי היו אוהבים את משה כנפשם ושומעים אליו Because they loved Moshe like their own soul and listened to him.

But after the חטא המרגלים, the spirit of the nation changed. They had just been told that they would die in the Midbar and not enter Eretz Yisrael. The promise of the land now felt distant. The people were disappointed and broken. The Ramban writes: אז היתה נפש כל העם מרה ואז מצא קרח מקום לחלוק Then Korach found room to challenge Moshe's actions.

This is why Dasan and Aviram later say: אף לא אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש Nor have you brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey (Bamidbar 16:14). They take the very language of the promise, ארץ זבת חלב ודבש, and turn it into an accusation. Instead of seeing Moshe as the faithful messenger of Hashem, they speak as if he brought them from Mitzrayim only to fail in the Midbar.

Korach knew when to speak. He waited for a moment when disappointment could be turned into suspicion. A complaint that would once have been rejected now sounded believable. This is one of the dangers of bitterness. When the soul is bitter, it becomes easier to believe the worst about others.

The Weapon of לייצנות

Korach's claim sounded serious, but Chazal show that his method was לייצנות, mockery that makes serious and sacred things look foolish. The Midrash Shochar Tov on Tehillim applies the pasuk זה קרח שהיה מתלוצץ על משה ועל אהרן to Korach: This is Korach who mocked Moshe and Aharon.

The Midrash portrays Korach as telling the people a story about a poor widow with two orphan daughters. She had one field. When she came to plow, Moshe told her: לא תחרוש בשור ובהמור יחדו Do not plow with an ox and donkey together. When she came to plant, he told her:

שדך לא תזרע כלאים Do not plant your field with mixed seed. When she came to harvest, he told her to leave leket, shikchah, and peah. When she made a pile of grain, he told her to give terumah, maaser rishon, and maaser sheini. The widow accepted everything. The Midrash says: הצדיקה עליה את הדין ונתנה לו She accepted the judgment upon herself and gave it to him. Finally, she sold the field and bought two sheep, hoping to live from their wool and offspring. Then Aharon came and claimed the bechor. When she sheared them, he claimed the first shearing. When she slaughtered them, he claimed the foreleg, jaws, and stomach. At the end, when she declared them cherem, Aharon took everything, citing the pasuk: כל חרם בישראל לך יהיה Every cherem in Israel shall be yours (Bamidbar 18:14). The widow was left crying with her daughters. Korach's final line was the sharpest: כל כך הם עושים ותולין בקדוש ברוך הוא

This was not honest argument. It was demagoguery. Korach did not challenge the law with careful reasoning. אין ביקורת החוק מבוססת על נימוקים עקרוניים כי אם על סיפור אודות פרט The criticism of the law is not based on principled arguments but on a story about one individual. He chose an יתומה and אלמנה, a widow and orphans, because those words immediately awaken pity. Once the crowd is moved emotionally, they may stop asking whether the story is fair, complete, or true to the whole Torah.

Korach also showed only one side of the Torah. He listed what the widow had to give, but hid everything the Torah gives to the widow. The same Torah that commands gifts to kohanim and Leviim also says: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה בגד אלמנה Do not take a widow's garment as security (Devarim 24:17). It says: לא תענון כל אלמנה ויתום Do not afflict any widow or orphan (Shemos 22:21). It commands the owner of the field to leave produce for the poor: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה ויתום It shall be for the stranger for the orphan and for the widow (Devarim 24:19). It says the same about the olive tree: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה ויתום It shall be for the stranger for the orphan and for the widow (24:20).

Korach erased all of this. He showed chovos without zechuyos, obligations without rights, demands without protections. He made it appear as if Torah only takes from the weak, when in truth Torah is the source of protection for the weak. That is the dishonest power of selective truth. Some of the laws he mentioned were real, but he arranged them falsely. He removed the context, hid the compassion, and turned a Torah of justice into a Torah of cruelty.

The most poisonous part was the attack on the lawgiver. Korach said: כל כך הם עושים ותולין בקדוש ברוך הוא All this they do and they hang it on the Holy One Blessed be He. In other words, Moshe and Aharon are not really speaking in the Name of Hashem. They are inventing these laws for themselves and pretending they come from Heaven.

Once this claim is accepted, everything collapses. If Moshe is not trusted, then Torah itself becomes suspect. If Aharon is only taking for himself, then kehuna becomes corruption. If the mitzvos are personal inventions, then obedience to Hashem is turned into submission to men. Korach's machlokes was so destructive because he tried to poison the trust on which Torah rests.

Holy Words With a Crooked Heart

Korach's slogan was powerful because part of it was true: כל העדה כלם קדשים The whole assembly is holy. Klal Yisrael is a holy nation. The problem was not the phrase itself, but what Korach did with it.

He used the holiness of the people to attack the structure Hashem had commanded. He used the honor of the nation to stir resentment against Moshe. He used sympathy for the widow to make Torah seem cruel. And while claiming that Moshe and Aharon were misusing the Name of Hashem, he himself used holy language to undermine trust in Hashem's Torah.

This is the danger of machlokes shelo l'shem Shamayim. It often speaks in beautiful language. It may speak about justice, holiness, compassion, or equality. But if the heart behind it is crooked, even holy words can become tools of jealousy and destruction.

How Could They Be Fooled

The most frightening question is how the people could be influenced by this. These were not people who had never seen the truth. They had left Mitzrayim לגאולה משעבוד, from darkness to light, from slavery to redemption. They had seen Krias Yam Suf. They had stood at Har Sinai. They had followed the Ananei Hakavod. They had eaten the mann. They had heard Moshe and Aharon speak in the Name of Hashem.

How could such people be drawn after mockery?

The answer is that miracles alone do not uproot jealousy, resentment, and suspicion from the human heart. A person can see great light and still allow that light to be darkened. Korach's ליצנות did not create a new world. It put a dark lens over the world they already knew. Suddenly Torah looked like oppression. Moshe looked like an opportunist. Aharon looked like someone taking for himself. The mitzvos of Hashem looked like the schemes of men.

This is why ליצנות is so dangerous. A serious question can be answered. A sincere difficulty can be discussed. But ליצנות does not seek an answer. It seeks to make holiness look ridiculous and trust look foolish.

Turning Light Into Darkness

Nechama closes with the contrast between what Torah truly is and what Korach made it appear to be. Tehillim says: פקודי השם ישרים משמחי לב מצות השם ברה מאירת עינים The commands of Hashem are straight rejoicing the heart the mitzvah of Hashem is pure enlightening the eyes (Tehillim 19:9).

Torah is meant to bring light, joy, and clarity. But עקוב לב האדם, the heart of man is crooked. There is no light so bright that a person cannot, בטפשות לבו ובחלקלקות לשונו, with the foolishness of his heart and the smoothness of his tongue, turn its brightness into darkness.

That is what Korach did. He made the mitzvos of Hashem sound cruel. He made leaders chosen by Hashem sound corrupt. He turned the holiness of Klal Yisrael into a weapon against the order Hashem had commanded. Through ליצנות, he took פקודי השם ישרים, the straight commands of Hashem, and made them look twisted.

The sin of Korach was therefore not only ambition. It was ambition dressed in the clothing of principle. It was jealousy spoken in the language of holiness. It was rebellion made to sound like compassion for the people.

That is why the parsha remains so powerful. It warns us that not every holy phrase comes from a holy place. Not every claim of justice is driven by justice. Not every criticism of leadership is sincere. The test is not only what words are spoken, but what heart stands behind them, and whether those words bring light or turn light into darkness.

Part 2 – The Assembly of Israel and the Assembly of Korach

Where Was the Nation

The first article on Korach dealt with מחלוקת קרח ועדתו, the machlokes of Korach and his group. It showed who joined Korach, what grievances they carried, and how Korach used ליצנות, mockery, to turn jealousy and resentment into a public rebellion. The second article asks a different question: where was the rest of Klal Yisrael during all of this?

At the beginning of the parsha, the main actors are clear. Korach stands with Dasan and Aviram, On ben Peles, and the two hundred and fifty men described as נשיאי עדה קראי מועד אנשי שם, leaders of the assembly, called to the meeting, men of renown. Moshe and Aharon stand opposite them. But what about the rest of the people? Were they with Moshe, with Korach, or merely watching from the side?

This question becomes central when the Torah says: ויקהל עליהם קרח Korach gathered against them the entire assembly to the entrance of the Ohel Moed (Bamidbar 16:19). Until now, the rebellion seemed limited to Korach and his group. Now כל העדה, the entire assembly, appears at the entrance of the Ohel Moed. Rashi, based on Midrash Tanchuma, explains how Korach gathered them: בדברי ליצנות כל הלילה הוא הלך אצל השבטים ופיתה אותם Through words of mockery all that night he went among the shevatim and persuaded them. Korach said: כסבורין אתם שעלי לבדי אני מקפיד איני Do you think I am concerned only for myself? I am concerned for all of you. Then he added: אלו באין ונוטלין כל הגדולות לו המלכות ולאחיו הכהונה These people come and take all the greatness for themselves, for him the kingship and for his brother the kehuna.

Korach understood that personal ambition sounds ugly, but public concern sounds noble. He therefore presented his quarrel as a fight for everyone's honor. He did not say, "I want power." He said: בשביל כולכם, I am fighting for all of you.

Still, the Torah leaves the people's position unclear. Were they actually convinced by Korach? Did they believe him? Or did they come only to watch the test of the ketores and see who would win? This uncertainty is itself part of the danger. A person can be drawn into machlokes even before he openly chooses a side.

Who Is הזאת

After Korach gathers the people, the Torah says: וירא כבוד השם אל כל העדה The glory of Hashem appeared to the entire assembly (Bamidbar 16:19). Then Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon: הבדלו Separate yourselves from this assembly and I will consume them in a moment (16:21).

The key question is the meaning of הזאת, this assembly. Does it mean עדת קרח, the assembly of Korach, or עדת ישראל, the assembly of Israel?

Rabbeinu Chananel, quoted by the Ramban, explains that הזאת means Korach's group alone. In his view, Hashem was not threatening all of Klal Yisrael, only the rebels. The phrase means עדת קרח, the assembly of Korach and not the assembly of Bnei Yisrael. When Hashem later says: העלו מסביב למשכן קרח דתן Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (16:24), He is clarifying which group must be separated from.

The Ramban rejects this explanation. He says it is difficult to call only Korach, Dasan, and Aviram an עדה in this context. More importantly, it cannot be that Moshe misunderstood the nevuah. The Ramban writes: Heaven forbid that Moshe would not understand his prophecy and err in it.

According to the Ramban, the threat was directed at the broader nation because they had begun to be drawn after Korach. They were not all Korach, and they were not all equally guilty, but they were no longer standing clearly with Moshe.

Suspicion Is Also Dangerous

The Ramban explains that at first the people were loyal to Moshe and Aharon: מתחילה היה לב העם אחרי משה ואהרן At first the heart of the people was with Moshe and Aharon. But Korach persuaded them that he was not fighting for himself. He claimed that כולם הוא מקנא, he was zealous for the honor of all of them. Once they heard that, ויטב הדבר בעיניהם, the matter was good in their eyes.

They may have thought that perhaps Korach's claim had merit. Perhaps the avodah should return to the bechorim. The Ramban says they gathered לראות אולי יישר בעיני האלוהים ותשוב העבודה לבכוריהם, to see whether perhaps it would be pleasing in Hashem's eyes and the avodah would return to their firstborn.

This was different from Korach's own rebellion, but it was still serious. The people were not leading the attack, but they were allowing suspicion to enter. They became מהרהרים אחרי רבם, questioning their teacher. Chazal teach that one who is מהרהר אחרי רבו, suspicious of his rebbi, is as if he is מהרהר אחרי השכינה, suspicious of the Shechinah.

That is why the people were in danger. They had not declared themselves rebels, but their hearts had shifted. They had begun to wonder whether Korach was right.

Moshe Pleads for Mercy

Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces and say: אל אלהי הרוחות לכל בשר God of the spirits of all flesh shall one man sin and You be angry with the entire assembly (Bamidbar 16:22).

According to the Ramban, this does not mean that the people were completely innocent. Moshe and Aharon were pleading for mercy. This is דרך מבקשי רחמים, the way of those who seek mercy. When pleading for the people, one tries to lessen the sin of the many and place the main responsibility on the one who caused it. The Ramban describes this as: They light the sin from upon the people and place it on the individual who caused it.

Korach was the instigator. He went among the shevatim, used ליצנות, and claimed that Moshe had taken מלכות for himself and kehuna for Aharon. Therefore Moshe and Aharon ask Hashem not to destroy the whole assembly because of האיש אחד, the one man who caused the sin.

The same kind of plea appears by David HaMelech during the plague. David says: I have sinned and I have done wrong but these sheep what have they done (II Shmuel 24:17). The people may not have been free of all guilt, but David pleads by placing the burden on himself. That is the way of those who ask for mercy.

A Limb That Separated

The Akeidas Yitzchak offers another way to understand Moshe's words. How could Moshe say האיש אחד יחטא ועל כל העדה תקצף, shall one man sin and You be angry with the whole assembly? We find elsewhere that the nation can be affected by one person's sin. By Achan, the pasuk says: חטא ישראל Israel sinned (Yehoshua 7:11), even though Achan was the one who took from the cherem.

The Akeidas Yitzchak answers that there is a difference between a sinner who remains part of the community and a sinner who separates himself from it. A community is like one body. If one limb is sick while still attached, the whole person is considered sick. But if the limb separates from the body, it is no longer part of that body. It becomes אבר הפורש מן החי, a limb separated from the living body.

That is what Korach did. Rashi explains ליקח את עצמו לצד אחד He took himself to one side to be divided from the assembly. Onkelos translates ליקח as ואתפלג, he separated himself. Korach was not merely a sinner within the community. He separated himself from the community and stood against it.

According to the Akeidas Yitzchak, Hashem's answer is exact. Since Korach and his group separated themselves from Klal Yisrael in thought and intention, Klal Yisrael must now separate from them in action. The Akeidah's language is: כמו שהם פירשו עצמם מהכלל Just as they separated themselves from the community in thought so the community must separate from them and move away from around them in action.

That is the meaning of Hashem's command: דבר אל העדה לאמר העלו Speak to the assembly saying go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (Bamidbar 16:24). It was not only a warning about physical danger. It was a demand that the people show where they stood.

Standing Nearby Is Not Neutral

The Malbim deepens this point. The people were still standing near the wicked, and that itself created guilt: עומדים אצל הרשעים האלה שנראה They were standing near these wicked people and it appeared as if they agreed with their deeds. Therefore they had to do something visible: שיעשו מעשה בפועל להראות שמתרחקים מהם They must perform an act in practice to show that they are distancing themselves from them and from their crowd.

There are times when standing nearby is no longer neutral. If a person remains close to rebellion, listens to its words, waits to see whether it will succeed, and refuses to separate from it, his presence begins to look like agreement. Hashem therefore commands the people to move away. They must show that Korach's machlokes is not theirs.

The Danger of Waiting

Many people do not choose immediately and clearly. They do not say openly, "I am with Korach." But they also do not say, "I am with Moshe." They wait and watch to see who will win.

Chazal describe this danger in the story of Haran, the brother of Avraham. When Avraham stood against Nimrod, Haran waited to see what would happen. He said: אם נצח אברם אנה מיניא ואם נצח נמרוד אנה מיניא If Avraham wins I am with him and if Nimrod wins I am with him.

That is not emunah. That is calculation. Haran wanted to stand with the winner, not necessarily with the truth. So too, in the story of Korach, the people could not remain spectators forever. The question

was not only what Korach would do. The question was whether Klal Yisrael would separate from him or continue standing near him.

סורו נא

Hashem says: *העלו מסביב למשכן קרח דתן ואבירם* Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram. But Moshe speaks to the people differently: *סורו נא מעל אהלי האנשים הרשעים האלה ואל תגעו בכל* Please turn away from the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything of theirs lest you be swept away in all their sins (Bamidbar 16:26).

Why does Moshe change the wording?

Rav Moshe Alshich explains that Moshe spoke gently and persuasively. He used *נא*, please, and spoke *לשונו* with the sweetness of his tongue. He wanted the people to understand that this was for their good. He did not command them from far away. He came near and pleaded with them to move away from danger.

But there is also a deeper difference between *העלו* and *סורו נא*. *העלו* can mean physical movement. Move away from the tents. *סורו* suggests something more, like *סור מרע*, turn away from evil. Moshe was telling them not only to move their bodies, but to remove themselves from the spirit of Korach's rebellion.

This distinction becomes important in the next pasuk: *ויעלו מעל משכן קרח דתן ואבירם* They went up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (16:27). Rav Moshe Alshich notes that they did not necessarily do this with a whole heart: *שלא עלו מלבם בעצם* They did not go up from their hearts in essence with a complete heart. Rather, *כי בושו משה*, because they were embarrassed before Moshe. Moshe came personally, and they moved away out of shame before him.

They fulfilled *העלו*, they physically moved away. But they did not fully fulfill *סורו נא* in the deeper sense. Their feet moved, but their hearts had not yet completely separated from Korach.

The Next Day

After the earth opens and swallows Korach's group, one might think the matter is finished. Hashem has made clear who was right. Moshe was vindicated. Korach was punished. The people moved away and survived.

But the very next day the Torah says: *וילנו כל עדת בני ישראל ממהרת על משה ועל אהרן* The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon saying you have killed the people of Hashem (17:6).

This shows that the poison of Korach's words had not fully disappeared. The people had seen the miracle, but they still accused Moshe and Aharon. They called Korach's group *עם השם*, the people of Hashem. Instead of accepting that the punishment came from Hashem because of rebellion, they accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths.

Physical distance was not enough. The people had moved away from the tents, but some had not moved away from the suspicion. They had stepped back from Korach's camp, but they had not removed Korach's claim from their hearts.

The Lesson

This second article is not only about Korach. It is about *עדת ישראל*, the assembly of Israel, and the danger of standing between truth and rebellion. Korach was the active rebel. He used *ליצנות*. He claimed to fight *בשביל כולכם*, for all of you. He accused Moshe and Aharon of

taking *מלכות* and *kehuna* for themselves. But the people's test was different. Their test was whether they would let themselves be drawn in.

At first, *לב העם אחרי משה ואהרן*, the heart of the people was with Moshe and Aharon. But then Korach spoke in the language of public concern, and *וייטב הדבר בעיניהם*, the matter became good in their eyes. They began to wonder. They began to watch. They became *מהרהרים*, suspicious of their teacher.

Hashem therefore demanded separation: *העלו מסביב למשכן קרח דתן ואבירם* Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram. This meant more than escape. It meant choice. A person cannot remain forever beside *machlokes* and claim to be neutral. Standing nearby can become agreement.

Moshe deepened the command: *סורו נא* Please turn away. Do not only leave Korach's tents. Leave Korach's path. Do not only move away from danger. Move away from suspicion, mockery, and the temptation to wait and see who wins.

The parsha therefore teaches two kinds of separation. There is separation of the feet, and there is separation of the heart. The first saved the people from being swallowed with Korach. The second was harder. The next day's complaint, *אתם המתם את עם השם*, shows that not everyone had achieved it.

The question of the article remains the question of every *machlokes*: where is *עדת ישראל* standing? Is it with Moshe, with Korach, or merely close enough to Korach to be influenced by him? When truth and rebellion stand opposite each other, neutrality cannot last forever. Sooner or later, a person must choose not only where to stand, but what to remove from his heart.

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

date: Jun 18, 2026, 8:25 PM

subject: Rav Frand - When it Comes to Shalom, We Do Not Rely on Chazaka -- Parshas Korach

When it Comes to Shalom, We Do Not Rely on Chazaka

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1386 – The Importance and Power of Saying Parshas Ketores. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Korach contains the terrible incident of Korach's challenge to the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, which was really a challenge to the entire transmission of Torah. That is why this was such a fundamental event wherein it was necessary to settle once and for all the basic principle that "Moshe is *emes* (true) and his Torah is *emes*." Among Korach's cohorts were Dasan and Aviram and Ohn ben Peles of Shevet (the Tribe of) Reuven.

Once again, Dasan and Aviram throw in their lot to torment Moshe Rabbeinu. The good news is that this is the last parsha in the Torah in which we will need to hear about the antics of Dasan and Aviram, because they don't make it past this parsha.

However, if we look through Sefer Shemos, Dasan and Aviram are always the ones who are the rabble-rousers and the instigators of animosity towards Moshe Rabbeinu. It was they who reported Moshe to Pharaoh when he killed the Egyptian. It was they who accosted Moshe Rabbeinu and said that he made the situation worse for them (when Moshe and Aharon first approached Pharaoh). They are the

ones who challenged Moshe Rabbeinu at the Yam Suf. They were his perpetual antagonists, to put it mildly. Interestingly, before the actual punishment occurred in our parsha, the pasuk says “And Moshe arose and went up to Dasan and Aviram, and the Elders of Israel went after him.” (Bamidbar 16:25). The Gemara in Sanhedrin comments on this and says, “From here we see that one should not hold onto a quarrel.” People get into arguments with friends or neighbors, and everyone stands firm and refuses to be the first one to make shalom or apologize. The Gemara says that from here we see that this is an inappropriate attitude. Moshe Rabbeinu himself went to Dasan and Aviram to try to make peace. Moshe Rabbeinu would be fully in his right to say, “Listen, Korach has to come to me and ask to make peace. They are the ones who started it.” But from here we see that it is wrong for either party to protract a machlokes.

I saw an interesting pshat in a sefer called Menachem Tzion by a Rav Menachem ben Zion Zachs, a son-in-law of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank. He has a different take on the expression “Eyn machzikim b’machlokes.” There is a Talmudic concept of “chazaka.” If something happens three times, it creates a “chazka.” It creates the halachic reality known as chazaka. We see this throughout Shas. The Menachem Zion says that “Eyn machzikim b’machlokes” does not mean that a person should not hold on to an argument. It means a person should not allow the halachic principle of “chazaka” to pasken (i.e. – determine) what is going to be.

Based on past experience, Moshe Rabbeinu could very well have argued “It is futile to go to Dasan and Aviram and try to make peace. These guys have a chazaka that they hate me and are out to get me. This has happened more than three times already! But from here we see that, unlike in other areas of halacha (e.g. – an ox that gores three times), by machlokes, we cannot assume or rely on chazaka based on past experience and history. Maybe the person will have a change of heart. We cannot rely on chazaka.

Fresh As Ever

As a Divine sign to verify the authenticity of the kehunah (priestly status) of Aharon Hakohen, the leader of each shevet was to take his match (staff) and place it in the Ohel Moed. The match that would blossom and produce a flower would thereby be declared by Divine sign as the shevet chosen by Hashem to be the kohanim.

This is exactly the procedure Moshe followed and behold, the match of Aharon, of Shevet Levi, blossomed and produced a flower. The Torah states: “...and behold the match of Aaron of the house of Levi had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and developed almonds.” (Bamidbar 17:23).

Moshe then brought out all the matos (staffs). Everyone saw which match had blossomed, and each tribal leader took back his own match. This established once and for all the legitimacy of the kehunah of Aharon Hakohen.

Two strange things happened here. First, the Ribono shel Olam only said that the match of the chosen person would bring forth a flower. What actually happened was that not only did a flower come out, but “a flower came out and the flower blossomed and produced almonds.” This is not what the Ribono shel Olam said. Why was that? Why was it not sufficient for the match to merely produce a flower?

The Rashbam says an interesting idea: When Moshe went into the Ohel Moed and removed the matos, all that was on the match of

Shevet Levi was a flower, just as the Ribono shel Olam had promised. However, after Moshe brought it out for everyone to see, at that point, the flower blossomed and produced a bud from which almonds grew.

In this way, no one could say that Moshe privately played around with the matos when he was in the Ohel Moed. In order to remove the thought that Moshe somehow rigged the demonstration of the matos regarding the growth of a flower inside the Ohel Moed, a miracle happened, such that in front of everyone, the miraculous growth of the match continued until it grew almonds right in front of them.

However, there is another difficulty here. Anyone who has a fruit tree in their backyard knows that the way a tree grows is as follows: First, the tree produces a flower. After the flower falls off, there is a bud. Then the fruit grows from that bud. However, here something amazing happened: The flower, the bud, and the almonds were all present simultaneously. Why shouldn’t the bud and flowers have fallen off like they normally do?

Rav Gedalya Schorr has a beautiful observation in his sefer: The lesson is that a person who is going to be the Kohen Gadol always needs to be in the state of mind and state of being that he is always blossoming, namely that he is always fresh. There is an expression “the blossom has fallen off,” indicating that after a while, a person loses his enthusiasm and excitement regarding a project or endeavor. The reason for this strange occurrence that the flower, the bud, and the fruit were present all at once is to show that Aharon Hakohen had this ability to always remain fresh, as if he just started. It is regarding such an attribute that the pasuk says, “The righteous will blossom like a tamar” (Tehillim 92:13).

There is a famous Sefas Emes in Parshas Beha’aloscha on the pasuk “Va’ya’as ken Aharon” (And Aharon did so). Rashi famously says “Melamed shelo sheenah” (This teaches that he did not deviate). That was the attribute of Aharon Hakohen. On the fortieth year of lighting the Menorah, he had the same enthusiasm and excitement as he did the first year. Therefore, the match of Aharon maintained its flower, even after it produced fruit, which is not the normal way that things grow. This shows the freshness and newness that was always part of Aharon’s avodah.

One Last Chance

When Moshe Rabbeinu wants to convince the people that he is the rightful leader, he says, “If these people’s death will be like the death of all other people, it is not Hashem who sent me...” (Bamidbar 16:29) Moshe Rabbeinu did not merely ask that they should be killed. He asked that the ground open up and swallow them alive. This is a “meesah meshuneh” (unnatural death). Imagine what a terrifying event this must have been: The ground opens up and the person knows what is happening to him. He realizes that he is being buried alive. He endures not only death but the whole torment of seeing his life being taken away from him in this elongated process. Isn’t it curious that Moshe Rabbeinu, who was always worried about Klal Yisrael and who always petitioned the Almighty on their behalf, here, on the contrary, asks the Ribono shel Olam to create a new creation and open up the earth to swallow his adversaries alive! This seems somewhat vindictive on the part of our great leader!

The Maragolias Hayam writes in Maseches Sanhedrin that he was once with the Belzer Rebbe, zt”l, during the week of Parshas Korach (in 1913) and he asked about this. The Belzer Rebbe said that this

was not vindictiveness or cruelty on the part of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu, as the earth opened up and the ground came caving down, wanted to give them the chance to do teshuva. Had they died instantly, from a Heavenly fire, or whatever it would have been, they would have had no chance to evaluate their mistakes.

As it turned out, they died in a fashion that provided time to do teshuva. They were looking up at the sky, the earth was open, and the dirt was piling in, first to their ankles, then to their knees, then to their waist, their shoulders, and their mouths. That gives them a few precious moments in which they could do teshuva. As we all know, a person can be a wicked person his whole life and at the very end, if he sincerely repents, he dies as a baal teshuva.

In fact, the Gemara says in Sanhedrin that someone walked by the place where Korach and his followers were swallowed and he heard them say “Moshe is emes and his Torah is emes,” meaning that at least some of them did do teshuva. That, Rav Reuven Margolias says, is why the halacha is that if a building collapses on top of a person and there is a doubt whether he is still alive or not, even if at best he will survive only momentarily, we desecrate the Shabbos to extend his life even for a few moments, because in those few moments he can do teshuva.

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu did over here. It was not cruelty. It was not vindictiveness. It was a question of “I want to give them one last chance to do teshuva.” And that is, in fact, what Bnei Korach did.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Korach is provided below: 017 – Visiting the Sick 062 – May the State of Israel Extradite a Jewish Criminal? 106 – The Temple Mount Today-Obligations & Restrictions 151 – The Mitzvah of Pidyon Haben: Some Fascinating Facts ... 1519 – Should You Say Tachnun at Mincha? 1560 – We Want to Make Our Own Shul – Are They Allowed? 1602 – Some Interesting Tachnun Shailos A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 22 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

From: allenklein@gmail.com

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Korach - Power versus Influence

The Korach rebellion was an unholy alliance of individuals and groups united by their grievances with Moses’ leadership. There was Korach himself, a member of the tribe of Levi, angry (according to Rashi) that he had not been given a more prominent role. There were the Reubenites, Dan and Aviram, who resented the fact that the key leadership positions were taken by Levites rather than members of their own tribe. Reuben had been Jacob’s firstborn, so some of his descendants felt that they should have been accorded seniority. Then there were the two hundred and fifty “leaders of the community, chosen from the assembly, men of repute” who felt aggrieved

(according to Ibn Ezra) that after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn to a single tribe, the Levites. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. The Korach story is an all too familiar tale of frustrated ambition and petty jealousy - what the Sages called “an argument not for the sake of heaven.”

What is most extraordinary about the episode, however, is Moses’ reaction. For the first and only time, he invokes a miracle to prove the authenticity of his mission:

Then Moses said:

“By this you will know that the Lord sent me to do these deeds; it was not my idea. If all these men die as others do, and share the common fate of all humanity, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something entirely new, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all they have, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you will know that these men have provoked the Lord.”

Num. 16:28-30

In effect, Moses uses his power to eliminate the opposition. What a contrast this is to the generosity of spirit he showed just a few chapters earlier, when Joshua came to tell him that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, away from Moses and the seventy elders. Joshua regarded this as a potentially dangerous threat to Moses’ leadership and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” Moses’ reply is one of the most majestic in the whole of Tanach:

“Are you jealous for me? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them all!”

Num. 11:29

What was the difference between Eldad and Medad on the one hand, and Korach and his co-conspirators on the other? What is the difference between Moses saying, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets,” and Korach’s claim that “All the community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s people”[1]? Why was the first, but not the second, a legitimate sentiment?

Is Moses simply being inconsistent? Hardly. There never was a religious leader more clear-sighted. There is a distinction here which goes to the very core of the two narratives. The Sages, in one of their most profound methodological observations, said that “the words of the Torah may be poor in one place but rich in another.” By this they meant that, if we seek to understand a perplexing passage, we may need to look elsewhere in the Torah for the clue. A similar idea is expressed in the last of Rabbi Ishmael’s thirteen rules of biblical interpretation:

“Where there are two passages which contradict each other, the meaning can be determined only when a third passage is found which harmonises them.”

In this case, the answer is to be found later in the book of Bamidbar, when Moses asks God to choose the next leader of the Israelites. God tells him to take Joshua and appoint him as his successor:

So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man infused with My spirit, and lay your hand upon him. Have him stand before Elazar the priest and the entire community, and in their sight, give him this charge. Give over to him some of your majesty, so that the entire Israelite community will obey him.”

Num. 27:18-20

Moses is commanded to perform two acts over and above presenting Joshua to the priest and people. First he is to “lay his hand” on

Joshua. Then he is to give Joshua “some of [his] splendour.” What is the significance of these two gestures? How did they differ from one another? Which of them constituted induction into office? The Sages, in Midrash Rabbah, added a commentary which at first sight only deepens the mystery:

“Lay your hand on him” - this is like lighting one light from another. “Give him some of your splendour” - this is like pouring from one vessel to another.

In actual fact it is this statement that will enable us to decode the mystery.

There are two forms or dimensions of leadership. One is power, the other, influence. Often we confuse the two. After all, those who have power often have influence, and those who have influence have a certain kind of power. In fact, however, the two are quite different, even opposites.

We can see this by a simple thought-experiment. Imagine you have total power, and then you decide to share it with nine others. You now have one-tenth of the power with which you began. Imagine, by contrast, that you have a certain measure of influence, and now you share it with nine others. How much do you have left? Not less. In fact, more. Initially there was only one of you; now there are ten. Your influence has spread. Power operates by division, influence by multiplication. With power, the more we share, the less we have. With influence, the more we share, the more we have.

So deep is the difference that the Torah allocates them to two distinct leadership roles: king and prophet. Kings had power. They could levy taxes, conscript people to serve in the army, and decide when and against whom to wage war. They could impose non-judicial punishments to preserve social order. Hobbes famously called kingship a ‘Leviathan’ and defined it in terms of power. The very nature of the social contract, he argued, was the transfer of power from individuals to a central authority. Without this, there could be no government, no defence of a country and no safeguard against lawlessness and anarchy.

Prophets, by contrast, had no power at all. They commanded no armies. They levied no taxes. They spoke God’s word, but had no means of enforcing it. All they had was influence - but what influence! To this day, Elijah’s fight against corruption, Amos’ call to social justice, Isaiah’s vision of the end of days, are still capable of moving us by the sheer force of their inspiration. Who, today, is swayed by the lives of Ahab or Jehoshaphat or Jehu? When a king or queen dies, their power ends. When a prophet dies, their influence begins. Returning to Moses: here was a man who occupied two leadership roles, not one. On the one hand, though monarchy was not yet in existence, Moses had the power and was the functional equivalent of a king. He led the Israelites out of Egypt, commanded them in battle, appointed leaders, judges and elders, and directed the conduct of the people. He had power.

But Moses was also a prophet, the greatest and most authoritative of all. He was a man of vision. He heard and spoke the word of God. His influence is incalculable. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, in a manuscript discovered after his death:

... an astonishing and truly unique spectacle is to see an expatriated people, who have had neither place nor land for nearly two thousand years ... a scattered people, dispersed over the world, enslaved, persecuted, scorned by all nations, nonetheless preserving its characteristics, its laws, its customs, its patriotic love of the early

social union, when all ties with it seem broken. The Jews provide us with an astonishing spectacle: the laws of Numa, Lycurgus, Solon are dead; the very much older laws of Moses are still alive. Athens, Sparta, Rome have perished and no longer have children left on earth; Zion, destroyed, has not lost its children.

Rousseau, *Cahiers de brouillons, notes et extraits*, no. 7843 (Neuchâtel).

The mystery of Moses’ double investiture of Joshua is now solved. First, he was told to give Joshua his authority as a prophet. The very phrase used by the Torah - *vesamachta et yadecha*, ‘lay your hand’ on him - is still used today to describe rabbinic ordination, which we call *semichah*, meaning, the ‘laying on of hands’ by master to disciple. Second, he was commanded to give Joshua the power of kingship, which the Torah calls ‘splendour’ (perhaps ‘majesty’ would be a better translation). The nature of this role as head of state and commander of the army is made quite clear in the text. God says to Moses: “Give him some of your splendour so that the whole Israelite community will obey him ... At his command, he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.” This is the language not of influence but of power.

The meaning of the Midrash, too, is now clear and elegantly precise. The transfer of influence (“Lay your hand on him”) is “like lighting one light from another.” When we take a candle to light another candle, the light of the first is not diminished. Likewise, when we share our influence with others, we do not have less than before. Instead, the sum total of light is increased. Power, however, is different. It is like “pouring from one vessel to another.” The more we pour into the second, the less is left in the first. Power is a zero-sum game. The more we give away, the less we have.

This, then, is the solution to the mystery of why, when Joshua feared that Eldad and Medad (who “prophesied within the camp”) were threatening Moses’ authority, Moses replied, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets.” Joshua had confused influence with power. Eldad and Medad neither sought nor gained power. Instead, for a while, they were given a share of the prophetic “spirit” that was on Moses. They participated in his influence. That is never a threat to prophetic authority. To the contrary, the more widely it is shared, the more there is.

Power, however, is precisely what Korach and his followers sought - and in the case of power, rivalry is a threat to authority. “There is one leader for a generation,” said the Sages, “not two.” Or, as they put it elsewhere, “Can two kings share a single crown?” There are many forms of government - monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy - but what they have in common is the concentration of power within a single body, whether person, group or institution (such as a parliament). Without this monopoly of the legitimate use of coercive force, there is no such thing as government. That is why in Jewish law “a king is not allowed to renounce the honour due to him.” Moses’ request that Korach and his followers be swallowed up by the ground was neither anger nor fear. It was not motivated by any personal consideration. It was a simple realisation that whereas prophecy can be shared, kingship cannot. If there are two or more competing sources of power within a single domain, there is no leadership. Had Moses not taken decisive action against Korach, he would have fatally compromised the office with which he had been charged.

Rarely do we see more clearly the stark difference between influence and power than in these two episodes: Eldad and Medad on the one hand, Korach and his fellow rebels on the other. The latter represented a conflict that had to be resolved. Either Moses or Korach would emerge the victor; they could not both win. The former did not represent a conflict at all. Knowledge, inspiration, vision - these are things that can be shared without loss. Those who share them with others add to spiritual wealth of a community without losing any of their own.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The influence we have lives after us; the power is oft interred with our bones." Much of Judaism is an extended essay on the supremacy of prophets over kings, right over might, teaching rather than coercion, influence in place of power. For only a small fraction of our history have Jews had power, but at all times they have had an influence over the civilisation of the West. People still contend for power. If only we would realise how narrow its limits are. It is one thing to force people to behave in a certain way; quite another to teach them to see the world differently so that, of their own accord, they act in a new way. The use of power diminishes others; the exercise of influence enlarges them. That is one of Judaism's most humanising truths. Not all of us have power, but we are all capable of being an influence for good.

[1] The first grievance that Korach expresses against Moses, Numbers 16:3.

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Rav Kook Torah

Korach: The Corruption of a Judge

What makes a judge dishonest? What are the cognitive stages in the corruption of a leader?

The Torah legislates support for the judges and teachers of Israel — the kohanim and Levites — through a system of tithes and gifts. This system provides them with a degree of financial independence, making them less susceptible to bribes and moneyed interests.

Biblical Scandal

Not every leader, however, maintains the standards of integrity that his public office demands. The Torah notes that the sons of the prophet Samuel did not follow in their father's path of selfless public service. On the contrary, "they went after gain, took bribes and subverted justice" (I Sam. 8:3).

What brought about their judicial corruption? What were the root causes?

The Sages offered several possibilities for the failings of Samuel's sons. At first glance, this appears to be a litany of various abuses of power. A careful reading, however, will recognize a pattern in their statements.

Rav Kook explained that the Talmud describes a progression of increasingly serious offenses. The Sages were not disagreeing about the facts in the case. They were mapping out the moral decline of a leader, step by step, into the morass of deceit and corruption.

Here are the various opinions, as quoted in Shabbat 56a:

- According to Rabbi Yonatan, Samuel's sons were not, in fact, guilty of any true crime. Their fault was in their failure to replicate the exemplary public service of their father. Samuel would travel all over the country, providing judicial services for the people. His sons,

on the other hand, stayed in their own court, and "increased the fees of their clerks and scribes."

- Rabbi Meir said: They would openly demand their salaries.
- Rabbi Yehudah said: They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs.
- Rabbi Akiva said: They would forcibly take an extra measure of tithes.
- Rabbi Yossi said: They took gifts by force.

What is the significance of all of these offenses? Let us follow the descent of the crooked politician, as he slides into the cesspool of graft and corruption.

Down-to-Earth Leadership

We can learn much about genuine public service from Samuel. The Torah praises Samuel for traveling around the country and judging the people in their towns (I Sam. 7:16). Why was this important?

A true leader considers himself to be literally a servant of the public. His dedication to the community is reflected in his sensitivity to their problems and concerns. He governs and advises them, not according to his own station in life, but as if he is standing in their shoes. This is the significance of Samuel's custom of judging the people in their hometowns. Samuel was able to identify their needs and challenges. As a result, his rulings were appropriate and his guidance was effective.

This type of leader is able to make a direct connection with the people. He does not need the trappings of officialdom. He does not surround himself with layers of bureaucrats and government officials.

Samuel's sons, however, failed to emulate this level of leadership. They would judge the people without leaving their city, without adjusting their mindset. In their eyes, they adjudicated properly. In addition, they required the assistance of a system of salaried clerks and scribes. As Rabbi Yonatan noted, this was not a crime. But it certainly falls short of the ideal of leadership as epitomized by Samuel.

Step 1: Just a Job

The other scholars taught that Samuel's sons were in fact guilty of graft. They described the various steps down the path of political corruption. Like all moral failings, abuse of authority comes in stages. Its danger and severity is magnified, of course, according to the power and influence of the position.

The first failing may appear to be minor, but it is indicative of a problematic attitude that is the root cause of more serious abuse. A community leader, and especially a spiritual leader, should recognize that public service is a great privilege. This recognition should be strong enough to make one willing to forgo financial remuneration. In fact, a true leader, aware of the importance of his work, may even feel a certain degree of impropriety in accepting payment.

Rabbi Meir described the fault of Samuel's sons as "openly demanding their salaries." They failed to value the importance of their public service. By demanding payment, they showed that they looked at their work as a job like any other — and not a sacred calling that is its own reward.

Step 2: Using Others

From this stage, it is but a small step to actual abuse of power. Once a leader is no longer altruistic in his attitude towards public service, he will begin to see it as a burden. He will have no scruples about

forcing others to handle his personal affairs. Since I take care of their needs, he reasons, why shouldn't they take care of mine?

This is the wrongdoing identified by Rabbi Yehudah: "They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs."

Step 3: Grabbing For More

From here it is another small step to the next level of corruption. Rav Kook noted that one who fails to live up to the moral demands of his position will ultimately sink below the ordinary standard of ethical behavior.

Leading and judging should be an inspiring vocation. A leader should feel that he is helping build a safer, more equitable society. In the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 10a), an honest judge is "God's partner in creation." But a flawed character, together with a failure to value his public work, will undermine the leader's sense of propriety and justice. Instead of values based on a sense of justice, he is ensnared by the glitter of superficial honors.

His lack of integrity is expressed quantitatively — he takes "an extra portion of tithes" — as well as qualitatively — he takes it by force.

Step 4: Legal in Name Alone

As long as he retains some semblance of morality, such a leader will not try to seize that which he has no legal claim to. But his dishonesty may lead to the lowest level, when justice and propriety are empty shells, high-minded words lacking any true content. He views the judicial system as merely a tool to ensure social order. It has no connection to our aspirations for an ethical society.

This is the level described by Rabbi Yossi: "They took gifts by force." If they were taken by force, how can they be called gifts?

This is a form of legal manipulation that is legal in name only. He may call them "gifts" or "contributions," but in fact they were taken forcibly. Calling them gifts only serves to silence what little is left of his conscience, allowing him to justify his crimes.

These are the stages in the descent of a judge corrupted by the lure of superficial honors and financial gain — a leader who should have been organizing society according to the foundations of justice and morality.

Summary of lecture by Rabbi YY Jacobson rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net, Jun 18, 2026 **Where Others Saw the End, He Saw the Beginning** In Tribute to the **Lubavitcher Rebbe, for His 32nd Yahrtzeit** Dedicated with prayers for a speedy recovery for Mindel Nechamya bas Malka

The Blossoming Staff

Parshas Korach tells the strange story of the test of the staffs. After Korach challenged the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, Hashem commanded that each tribe place a staff in the Mishkan, with the name of its leader written upon it. Aharon's name was written on the staff of Levi. The next morning, Aharon's staff had blossomed, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.

The question is obvious. Why was this miracle necessary? The rebellion had already been answered in dramatic ways. Korach and his followers were swallowed by the earth. The 250 men who offered ketores were consumed by fire. A plague struck those who continued to complain. If those events did not settle the matter, what would a blossoming staff add?

The answer is that the staff was not merely meant to prove that Aharon had been chosen. That had already been shown. The staff came to explain why Aharon was chosen.

A staff is a dead branch. Once it was attached to a tree, full of life and growth. Now it is severed, dry, and lifeless. Yet Aharon's staff came back to life. It blossomed and produced fruit.

That is the sign of a true Kohen Gadol. Aharon could look at what others saw as dry and lifeless and see hidden life. He could look at a person who seemed spiritually cut off and still see the possibility of growth. His greatness was not only that he was holy, but that he could awaken holiness in others.

From Ashes to Life

This message speaks powerfully to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. The Jewish world seemed like a dry staff. Communities had been destroyed, families shattered, and an entire world had gone up in smoke. What remained looked like ashes.

Yet survivors and refugees began to rebuild. They rebuilt families, schools, shuls, yeshivos, communities, and Jewish life on new soil. One of the great leaders of this renewal was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

The Rebbe refused to let destruction define the future. Memorials, books, lectures, and conferences were necessary, but they were not enough. The Rebbe urged Jews to bring the staff back to life. Marry, have children, build schools, open shuls, create camps, found yeshivos, send shluchim, reach another Jew, and rebuild a shattered world.

He opened his heart to an orphaned generation and gave it hope. He sent emissaries across the world to rekindle Jewish life wherever Jews could be found. Where others saw only loss, he saw the beginning of renewal. Where others saw a dead branch, he saw the possibility of blossoms.

The United States itself had once been viewed by many as a treifene medinah, a place where Jewish identity dissolved. But the Rebbe saw that America could become a platform for spreading Torah and Yiddishkeit. He understood that the modern world, beneath its secular surface, contained a deep spiritual thirst. He used modern tools to awaken ancient truths.

That was one of his defining gifts. He could see crisis as opportunity. He could see disintegration as the beginning of rebirth. He could see life inside what appeared lifeless.

The Phoenix

Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky related a story that captures this idea.

Around 1973, the widow of Jacques Lifschitz, the famous sculptor, came to the Rebbe after her husband's sudden passing. Before he died, Lifschitz had been working on a large sculpture of a phoenix, commissioned by Hadassah for the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus in Yerushalayim.

His widow, an artist herself, wanted to complete the work. But she had been told that the phoenix was not a Jewish symbol and therefore should not be placed in Yerushalayim.

The Rebbe asked Rabbi Krinsky to bring him a Tanach and opened to Iyov, where it says, אֲרֵבָה כְּחֹל יָמִים, *I shall multiply my days like the chol*. The Rebbe explained that Chazal describe the chol as a bird that lives for a thousand years, dies, and then rises again from its ashes. It was therefore very much a Jewish image.

Mrs. Lifschitz was overjoyed, and the project was completed.

In that moment, the Rebbe gave hope to a grieving widow. In a larger sense, this was the story of his life. He helped raise the spirit of the Jewish people from the ashes and showed that even after devastation, new life could begin.

The Student Who Smelled of Smoke

Rabbi Berel Baumgarten, a Jewish educator in Brooklyn before moving to Buenos Aires, once wrote to the Rebbe about a student. Each Shabbos afternoon, when the class gathered to learn, this student would enter smelling of cigarette smoke. It seemed clear that he was smoking on Shabbos. Rabbi Baumgarten worried that the boy's influence might weaken the other students and asked whether he should expel him, even without clear proof.

The Rebbe answered with only a reference: עיין אבות דרבי נתן פרק יב, *See Avos Derabi Noson, chapter 12.*

That chapter describes Aharon HaKohen. Aharon brought many people back from sin, not by rejecting them, but by drawing them close. He greeted even sinners with warmth, love, and respect. Later, when such a person was tempted to sin, he would think, How can I face Aharon after doing this? He thinks so highly of me. How can I let him down? And that feeling would lift the person.

This was the answer to Rabbi Baumgarten. Do not throw the boy away. Love him more. Show him dignity. Let him feel that you believe in him. See in him what he cannot yet see in himself. If you treat him like a soul with a future, he may become just that.

That was Aharon's greatness. His staff blossomed because he knew how to make others blossom. He never looked at a Jew and said, This one is dry, brittle, and finished. He saw the hidden root, the possibility of renewal, the future fruit.

The Lesson

Since October 7, the Jewish people have again faced pain, fear, and crisis. These are not simple times. But the message of Aharon's staff is that crisis can become the beginning of life. A dry staff can blossom. Ashes can give way to renewal. A wounded people can rise again.

That was the Rebbe's message. Where others saw the end, he saw the beginning. Where others saw despair, he saw responsibility. Where others saw a dead staff, he saw almonds waiting to grow.

<https://5tjt.com/korach-misreading-intentions/>

Korach: Misreading Intentions

By: **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

We had hit rock bottom. After the sin of the spies, we were sentenced to wander the desert for forty years. Every adult over twenty was condemned to die before entering Eretz Yisrael.

At this point, we spiraled into a full-blown rebellion against Moshe's authority. Korach and his band of insurgents whipped the nation into a frenzy, accusing Moshe of egotism, nepotism, and deception.

The debacle of the spies reflected a lack of faith in Jewish destiny and in Eretz Yisrael. It was a moment of public panic that overwhelmed reason and led the nation to question both the land and Hashem's promise. The rebellion of Korach was different. It was not driven by fear but by anger and resentment. Korach, a gifted demagogue, manipulated the people into joining a campaign rooted in his own personal ambitions.

Ultimately, the rebellion against Moshe led to a complete breakdown of communication. Repeatedly, Moshe attempted to engage the rebels. They refused to listen. They embraced Korach's accusations and never paused to consider Moshe's perspective.

Once communication collapsed, the two sides no longer understood each other's intentions. Perhaps some of the rebels' concerns

deserved discussion. In the past, when the burden of leadership became too heavy, Hashem appointed seventy elders to assist Moshe. Perhaps there were other ways to broaden leadership responsibilities. But the claim that Moshe was driven by ego, nepotism, and a hunger for power was absurd. Time and again, he had defended the people and saved them from divine punishment. The refusal to listen allowed Korach's camp to completely misread his intentions.

Once communication ceases and intentions are misunderstood, compromise becomes nearly impossible. False narratives take hold, distrust deepens, and every action is viewed through a lens of suspicion. The rebellion of Korach illustrates the destructive consequences of a society trapped within competing narratives.

The Gap In Narratives

We are living through a very delicate moment in Israeli society. The issue of Charedi non-conscription is straining our social fabric and deepening divisions within our society.

Unfortunately, the lack of communication and interaction has created a widening gap in narratives. Charedim are misreading the intentions of the broader public in advocating conscription.

The broader Israeli public has little interest in hollowing out Charedi identity. Many Israelis deeply respect Torah and tradition even if they do not personally commit to a life centered around Torah study. There is no national or political agenda to destroy Torah study or the Charedi lifestyle.

Most Israelis are simply hurting. As the war drags on and fathers of large families report for their third round of extended miluim service, they are asking themselves: "Don't they understand the burden we are carrying? Don't they see how this is affecting our families?" Their plea is not to dismantle the Charedi world but to share the burden of this long war more broadly.

Many would argue that military service would significantly affect Charedi identity and lifestyle. That is a legitimate argument, whether one agrees with it or not. Opposition to conscription on those grounds is understandable and coherent. But the call for broader Charedi participation is not rooted in a sinister desire to weaken Torah study or undermine religious commitment.

We are facing a tragedy of miscommunication.

Part of the challenge stems from the inherent nature of Charedi culture. Much of its strength lies in its commitment to continuity. Other segments of Orthodoxy respond to modernity through adaptation; Charedi society responds more cautiously. It places a premium on continuity, cultural insulation, and preserving inherited norms. Change is not rejected, but it is approached slowly.

This instinct has served the Charedi community well. It has helped preserve a robust Torah world through periods of rapid social upheaval. But it can also create a tendency to view contemporary challenges through the lens of earlier historical struggles. New situations are sometimes interpreted as recurring versions of old battles, even when the circumstances are very different.

There is a well-known story about the closing of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva in 1892. The Czarist Russian government, deeply hostile to Jewish life and religion, repeatedly attempted to impose a significant secular studies curriculum on the yeshiva. After years of pressure, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the Netziv, chose to close what was arguably the most prominent yeshiva of the 19th century rather than

submit to those demands. Whether this was the primary reason for the closure remains debated. Nevertheless, the story became part of the Charedi collective memory.

As a result, whenever governments seek to introduce a core secular curriculum into yeshivot, the story of Volozhin is often invoked. Yet the comparison is not apt. The governments of the United States and Israel are not similar to Czarist Russia. They are not motivated by antisemitism or a desire to uproot Torah study, but by a desire to improve economic participation and gainful employment. One may oppose those policies, but the circumstances are fundamentally different from the struggle faced by the Volozhin Yeshiva, which confronted an antisemitic regime intent on restricting religious life and undermining traditional Jewish education.

We are witnessing a similar misreading today. Calling for Charedi military service is not, for most Israelis, an attempt to destroy Torah. It is a sincere plea to share the burden of a long and exhausting war. One can oppose conscription on the grounds that it will diminish Torah study or weaken Charedi identity. Those are legitimate concerns. But the lack of communication has created a complete divergence of narratives, causing many people to hear motives that were never intended.

Misreading Each Other

This misunderstanding is not solely the result of Charedi hyper-preservation. Reactions from the broader public can sometimes become so sharp and sweeping that they reinforce Charedi suspicions. I have heard people respond to Charedi behavior by declaring, “This is not my Judaism.” That is deeply charged language. One may believe that a particular policy or attitude is severely morally or halachically flawed. But no single flaw, however central or painful, renders an entire religious community or lifestyle illegitimate. Every community has shortcomings that require criticism and correction.

To find consensus, we must get on the same page. We must also be careful about the language and rhetoric we use.

Words That Wound

Two weeks ago, a busload of Chasidim attacked the home of my neighbor, a Supreme Court justice whom they viewed as an enemy of Torah study because of his role in rulings surrounding this controversy. I know him personally and can attest that this is a complete misunderstanding of his intentions. One can argue that his rulings will inadvertently harm the Charedi community. But to portray him as someone motivated by hostility to Torah is a profound misreading.

The protest itself turned violent. The protesters shouted at the judge and at our neighbors, repeatedly calling them Nazis. One of my neighbors, a child of Holocaust survivors, was called Hitler.

It should be self-evident that any Jew who labels another Jew a Nazi has lost all historical perspective. The grandparents of both groups may well have shared the same ghettos and concentration camps. In a society of divided narratives in which even the role of the State of Israel is not a matter of consensus, the last shared historical narrative we possess is our recovery from the Holocaust. Sadly, these terms are being shouted by Chasidim whose own communities were disproportionately devastated by Hitler.

To begin healing our fractures, we must properly read intentions and be careful about the historically toxic language we employ. We must repair our communication.

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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-I Elo-hei haRuchot l'Khol Basar* - "the God of the spirits of all flesh" - a phrase he used only one other time. When Mosheh asked that God appoint his successor (Bamidbar 27:16), he addressed Him as *Elo-hei haRuchot l'Khol Basar*. What is the meaning of this Divine address and why is it used exclusively in these two places by Mosheh?

III. THE K'TORET AND THE 'ANAN

In the description of the Avodat Toharat haMikdash (the service of purification of the Sanctuary), which we associate with Yom haKippurim, the Torah tells us that:

[Aharon] shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before YHVH, and two handfuls of crushed sweet K'toret, and he shall bring it inside the curtain and put the K'toret on the fire before YHVH, that the cloud of the K'toret may cover the mercy seat that is upon the covenant, or he will die. (Vayyikra 16:13)

Generating the "cloud of the K'toret" (*Anan haK'toret*) is the apparent purpose of burning the K'toret itself - in other words, Aharon was told to burn the K'toret in such a manner as the cloud of smoke would cover the entire Kapporet. The Gemara infers from the last two words in this verse that if he does not successfully "encloud" the Holy of Holies with the smoke of the K'toret, that he is liable for death (BT Yoma 53a; see MT Avodat Yom haKippurim 5:25). Indeed, the opening phrase of the description of the Avodat Yom haKippurim in the Torah introduces the K'toret:

YHVH said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. (Vayyikra 16:2)

This "cloud" is understood by our Rabbis to refer to the cloud of the K'toret (see BT Yoma ibid., MT Avodat Yom haKippurim 1:7).

As Ramban points out (introduction to Parashat Terumah), the many facets of the Mishkan were established in order to maintain a permanent connection and association with the stand at Sinai - to wit, to take Sinai on the road to Eretz Yisra'el. Since the K'toret, in its most central use, was intended to create a cloud of smoke that would fill the Holy of Holies, it is easy to understand the parallel with Har Sinai. Just as Sinai was covered with an *Av he'Anan* (thick cloud) during the Revelation (Sh'mot 19:16; 24,15-18), similarly, the Mishkan was to be covered with the 'Anan haK'toret when God's Presence was to be made most manifest.

Regarding the cloud which covered Sinai, God told Mosheh:

I am going to come to you in an *Av ha'Anan*, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after. (Sh'mot 19:9). In other words, Mosheh's continued "successful" existence inside of this *Av ha'Anan* would establish and strengthen his leadership and the people's faith that he was, indeed, God's prophet. (See Ramban ad loc.)

We can now "connect the dots" and understand the relevance of using the K'toret - the replica of the Sinai-cloud - to demonstrate the propriety of Mosheh's selection, as well as that of Aharon and the Levi'im.

Our answer, however, only takes us halfway - why did Mosheh choose this "dangerous" demonstration and why did Korach and his followers take him up on it?

In addition, our earlier questions (of a more local nature) remain unanswered. In order to understand them, we have to examine why the 'Anan - and its K'toret substitute - would represent and demonstrate Divine selection.

IV. REVELATION: THE COEXISTENCE OF MULTIPLE TRUTHS

In the Pesikta Rabbati (21:4), we read:

R. Yanai said: The Torah which God gave to Mosheh included forty-nine arguments in favor of purity and forty-nine arguments in favor of impurity [on any given question]...[Mosheh] asked: "How should we rule?" - to which God answered: "If those who argue in favor of impurity are the majority, it is impure; if those who argue in favor of purity are the majority, it is pure."

The Rabbis did not view the resolution of Halakhic disputes as determinations of "right" vs. "wrong"; rather, they understood that the Torah included both possibilities and that arguments could be marshalled to support either side. In the final analysis, the earthly court would decide which arguments held the greatest sway. [The reader is directed to Dr. Eliezer Berkovitz's "Not In Heaven" and to Dr. Moshe Koppel's "Meta-Halakha" for in-depth analyses of this area of Halakhic development]. In other words, when Mosheh experienced the Divine Revelation in the 'Anan, he was experiencing a co-existence of theoretically intolerant opposites: Responses of "Valid" and "Invalid" to the same Halakhic questions. This is the Divine Reality that no other prophet could face head-on (see Bamidbar 12).

Revelation, which included mutually contradictory and divergent versions of the Truth, was accompanied by this 'Anan - the thick cloud. This cloud was replicated in the Mishkan via the K'toret.

This K'toret, although offered up daily, finds its most critical application on Yom haKippurim, as part of the purification of the Mishkan. Purification, as Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l points out throughout "Al haTeshuvah", is an inherent contradiction which only the Divine can sustain - taking that which is human, frail and fallible and cleansing it as if the stain of sin and the blemish of impurity had never polluted that which is holy. The K'toret, just like the original 'Anan, allowed for that Divine mystery of coexistent contradiction. The K'toret even included, by definition, a pungent element which, like all other 10 spices, was indispensable to its validity:

R. Hana b. Bizna said in the name of R. Shim'on Hasida: Any fast which does not include *Posh'ei Yisra'el* (the sinners among Israel) is not considered a fast; the galbanum (*Helb'nah*) which is pungent was included among the spices for the K'toret" (K'reitot 6b) This is where Korach erred - and why the K'toret was the perfect demonstration of Korach's wrong-headed philosophy.

V. THE STRIVING FOR HOLINESS

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

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

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

VI. SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by Rav Eitan Mayer

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

WHAT ARE THEY AFTER?

First of all, what do the rebels want?

Possibilities:

- 1) Priesthood?
- 2) Political leadership?
- 3) Something else?

Let us consider the evidence for each possibility:

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

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

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

WHOM ARE THEY AFTER?

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

WHO ARE "THEY," ANYWAY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOT SO FAST:

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

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

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

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

DIGGING DEEPER:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hashem, listening to Miriam's leshon ha-ra, immediately orders Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam to the Ohel Mo'ed, where He appears in a pillar of cloud and furiously rebukes Miryam and Aharon for what they have said about Moshe. Many commentators struggle to explain why Moshe must be present to witness the dressing-down that Miryam and Aharon receive. Why must Moshe witness as Hashem blasts of his sister and strikes her with a plague?

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

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

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

to toss this accusation.

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

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

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

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

Hashem is truly addressing Moshe himself:

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

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

ENTER KORAH:

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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PARSHAT KORACH

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIGHTING FOR A COMMON CAUSE

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

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

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

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

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

describe Moshe Rabeinu's suggestion:

"Come morning, and God will make known who is His and who is holy... and he whom He has chosen..."

This you shall do, take fire-pans, Korach and his entire group, ... and put on them KToret before God [i.e. at the Mishkan]... and he [who's offering] God shall choose will be established as "kadosh"... (see 16:5-7)

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

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

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

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

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

In other words, the purpose of the "ktoret" test is to determine the validity of Korach's claim that everyone in Am Yisrael is "kadosh" (see 16:3), and hence everyone should be allowed to offer korbant. Moshe is suggesting that Korach & his 250 followers should 'give it a try'. If God accepts these offerings, then Korach would be proven correct - if not, then Moshe will be proven correct.

SPIRITUAL EQUALITY

To support this interpretation, we simply need to take a look at Moshe's second response to Korach (see 16:8-11), i.e. in his additional censure to the Levites who have joined Korach:

"Hear me, sons of Levi - is it not enough that God has designated you to come close [i.e. to assemble and carry the Mishkan]... and now you and your fellow Levites DO YOU SEEK THE KEHUNA [priesthood] as well.... - why then do you complain AGAINST AHARON." (see 16:8-11)

This censure of "bnei Levi" - especially the phrase of 'do you seek the priesthood as well - proves that Korach and his 250 men are challenging the decision to limit the offering of "korbanot" to Aharon and his sons. These dissidents demand that anyone who so desires should be allowed to offer "korbanot", for ALL members of Israel are 'spiritually equal' ["ki kol ha'eydah kulam kedoshim..." (see 16:3)].

This also explains why this extra censure is directed specifically to "bnei Levi". Moshe's criticism focuses on the hypocrisy of these Levites - for if they were so worried about 'spiritual equality' why didn't they complain earlier when they themselves were chosen over any other tribe to carry the Mishkan!

Apparently, these dissidents believe that the limitation of offering korbant to Aharon's family stems from Moshe's nepotism, rather than from a divine command. [See Chizkuni 16:15.] Hence, this 'ktoret test', as Moshe suggests, will determine who indeed is capable of offering korbant - i.e. it may be only Aharon, or possibly all (or at least some) of the 250 men as well. [See also 16:16-17.]

ENTER - GROUP TWO

Up until this point, we are left with the impression that everyone mentioned in the opening two psukim - i.e. Korach, Datan, Aviram, and the 250 men - join together in this protest. Hence, we should expect all of them to participate in this 'showdown'.

However, as the narrative continues, a very different picture emerges. Note from 16:12 that Datan & Aviram, for some reason, are singled out:

"And Moshe sent for DATAN & AVIRAM, but they answered: WE WILL NOT COME UP..." (see 16:12-14)

Why must Moshe SEND for Datan and Aviram? After all, were they not together with Korach & Company when they first gathered against Moshe (see 16:2-3)? Furthermore, for what purpose does Moshe call them? Does he want them to participate in the 'ktoret test'? At first glance, it remains quite unclear concerning what this summons is all about.

However, their response to Moshe - "we will not COME UP" - already suggests that Datan & Aviram may comprise an independent group. Note how they remain in their own camp [recall that they are from shevet Reuven] and refuse to even come near the Ohel Moed (where the 'ktoret test' is being conducted).

Furthermore, from their censure of Moshe that accompanied their response to his summons (see below), it becomes quite clear that Datan & Aviram have a more 'political' agenda (and aren't terribly interested in 'spiritual equality').

"Is it not enough that you took us out of a land flowing with milk and honey [referring to Egypt!] to die in the desert and NOW - YOU CONTINUE TO ACT AS LORD OVER US! You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk & honey (as Moshe had promised)... [therefore] we will not come up!" (16:13-14)

In this brazen defiance of Moshe's summons, Datan & Aviram totally reject Moshe's political LEADERSHIP. In their eyes, Moshe has failed as the nation's leader. After all, when Bnei Yisrael first accepted Moshe as their leader in Egypt, he had promised to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey (see Shmot 3:16-17, 4:30-31). Now that Moshe has informed Bnei Yisrael that entering the Promised Land is no longer on the horizon, Datan & Aviram (and most likely many others) reject the legitimacy of his leadership and authority.

Clearly, this complaint differs drastically from Korach's initial objection to the KEHUNA! Korach and the 250 men challenge Aharon's exclusive status, but never question Moshe's leadership. After all, they all agree to the 'test' that Moshe himself initiates. Datan and Aviram, however, challenge specifically Moshe's leadership.

MOSHE'S PRAYER

Conclusive proof of this distinction can be found in Moshe's immediate reaction to Datan & Aviram's complaint. Pay careful attention to how Moshe turns to God in prayer:

"And Moshe became angry and said to God - 'al tefyen el MINCHATAM' - Pay no attention to their 'oblation' - I did not take from them a single donkey, nor have I wronged anyone of them." (see 16:15)

At first glance, it appears that Moshe now begs God not to accept the "ktoret" offerings. However, this cannot be for two reasons:

- 1) Datan & Aviram chose not to participate in the "ktoret" test, so why would Moshe request that God not accept an offering that they aren't even bringing?

[See Ramban!]

- 2) The Hebrew word "minchatam" refers either to a 'meal offering' (see Vayikra chapter 2) or a gift of some sort (see Breishit 32:13,18). Certainly, it is not another name for "ktoret" (incense).

[Note how the commentators dealt with this problem. Even though the first opinion of Rashi claims that "minchatam" indeed refers to the KTORET offering, Ramban (rightly so) disagrees - suggesting that it refers to any type of prayer (or offering) that they may offer. See also Ibn Ezra & Seforno who explain this pasuk in a similar manner.]

Furthermore, the reason that Moshe advances - "for I have not taken anything from them" - clearly relates to Moshe's counter-claim that his leadership has been without corruption. Therefore, this entire prayer relates to Datan & Aviram's complaint against his leadership. Moshe simply turns to God to affirm the legitimacy of his own [divinely appointed] leadership

that has now been challenged. Moshe reminds God that he has been a faithful leader who never abused his power.

TWO GROUPS - TWO GRIPEs

Let's summarize what has emerged thus far. We have identified TWO independent grievances, raised by TWO independent groups, situated in TWO different locations:

GROUP ONE - the 250 men ["adat Korach"]- protest Aharon's exclusive rights to the KEHUNA. They stand ready for their 'test' at the OHEL MOED;

[Note that the Torah consistently refers to this group as "adat Korach" (see 16:5,6,11).]

GROUP TWO - Datan & Aviram (& followers) - complain against the POLITICAL leadership of MOSHE. They gather in the territory of shevet Reuven.

[This location is later referred to as "Mishkan Korach Datan v'Aviram" (see 16:24-27).]

Of course, it remains to be seen where Korach himself stands on these two issues, but there can be no doubt that there are two groups with two very different agendas.

RE-ENTER GROUP ONE

Up until this point (i.e. 16:1-15), the narrative, although a bit complex, has flowed in a logical order: it first presents both groups, followed the presentation of the individual complaints of each faction. But now, for some reason, the narrative begins to 'see-saw,' seemingly randomly, between Moshe's confrontations with each of these two groups.

Note how in 16:16 the narrative abruptly switches from Moshe's response to Datan & Aviram (group II) back to his original confrontation with "adat Korach" (group I):

"And Moshe said to Korach, tomorrow, you and all your company [the 250 men] be before God [at the Mishkan], you and they and Aharon..." (16:16-17 / compare with 16:5-7)

Then the narrative continues to describe this confrontation: The next morning, all 250 men assemble at the Ohel Moed ready with their "machtot" (fire-pans) and "ktoret" (16:18), while Korach rallies a mass crowd to watch (16:19). But then, just as we expect to find out the outcome of this 'showdown', again we find an abrupt change in the narrative.

RE-ENTER GROUP TWO

Precisely at this critical point in the narrative, we find a new 'parshia' (note 16:20-22), which describes God's [first] direct intervention (in relation to this incident), and Moshe & Aharon's reaction.

"And God spoke to Moshe & Aharon: 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' And they fell upon their faces, and said: 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall - "ish echad" - one man sin, and You will be wroth with - "kol ha'EYDAH" - the entire congregation?' (16:20-22)

Review these psukim once again, noting how it is not so clear concerning who "ish echad" and "ha'EYDAH" refer to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since Datan & Aviram did not come to the "ktoret" test, we must conclude that their "mishkan" must be located in the area of the Tribe of Reuven. Most probably, this site served as 'party headquarters' for this group of people who have openly rebelled against Moshe's political leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO GROUPS - TWO PUNISHMENTS

At this point, God must prove to the political dissidents that Moshe's leadership was by divine appointment. Therefore, God Himself must 'create' a "beriya" - a new form of creation - to punish this group. Those who distance themselves from this

group are saved (see 16:27-34). However, note that the ground miraculously devours only the members of Group Two - i.e. Datan & Aviram and their staunchest followers.

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

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

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

GROUP ONE -

the 250 men at the Ohel Moed - CONSUMED by fire.

GROUP TWO -

Datan & Aviram & Co. - SWALLOWED by the ground.

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

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

KORACH - THE POLITICIAN

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

	<u>GROUP ONE</u>	<u>GROUP TWO</u>
Members:	250 men	Datan & Aviram + followers
Claim :	priesthood	new political leadership
Against:	Aharon	Moshe
Reason:	spiritual equality	failure of leadership
Location:	Ohel Moed	shevet Reuven
Punishment:	consumed by fire	swallowed by the ground

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

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

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

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

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

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

KORACH - WHERE ARE YOU?

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

Furthermore, although Korach himself is never mentioned in the punishment of Group Two (scan 16:23-34 carefully to verify this), many of his followers, described by Chumash as "ha'adam asher l'Korach", are swallowed up by the ground (see 16:32) together with Danan & Aviram.

In fact, it remains unclear precisely how Korach himself dies. Was he swallowed by the ground or consumed by the fire?

The 'last time he was spotted' was in 16:19 together with the 250 men (Group One) at the Ohel Moed. But from 16:25 it seems that only the 250 men were consumed, but NOT Korach himself! On the other hand, 16:32 informs us that Danan & Aviram and ALL of Korach's men were swallowed up - but Korach himself seems to be 'missing! Did he escape at the last minute from both?

Apparently not, for later in Sefer Bamidbar (see 26:9-10) we are told quite explicitly that Korach was indeed swallowed. But to complicate matters even further, Devarim 11:6 implies that only Danan & Aviram were swallowed up.

[Based on the complexity of these psukim, the Gemara in Sanhedrin 110a suggests that he received both punishments! First he was burnt by the fire at the Ohel Moed, and then his body rolled to the area of Danan v'Aviram and swallowed up by the ground.] (See also Ibn Ezra on 16:35.)

So why does the Torah describe these events in such an evasive manner? What can this manner of presentation teach us about the nature of Korach's involvement? Finally, why does Chumash attempt to give us the impression that Korach may be in two places at the same time?

One could suggest that this 'zig-zag' style reflects the nature of the coalition that exists between these two dissident groups, for they share only one common denominator- KORACH.

But what was Korach's motivation in all of this?

To answer this question, let's return to the opening pasuk of this Parsha (see introduction). By not telling us what Korach 'took', the Torah wants the reader to ask this very question - what did Korach take?

[If you didn't ask yourself this question when you begin reading, you most probably would have noticed the **existence** of these two groups as you continue.]

COALITION POLITICS

Korach 'took' two ostensibly 'legitimate' protest groups and joined them together to form his own political power base. [See Ramban 16:1.] Whereas each group alone may have not dared to openly challenge Moshe and Aharon, Korach encourages them to take action. Danan and Aviram, 'inspired' by Korach, establish their own 'headquarters' - "Mishkan Korach, Danan, & Aviram" - in defiance of Moshe's leadership. Likewise, the 250 men, including members of shevet Levi, are roused to openly challenge the restriction of the KEHUNA to Aharon.

Rather than encouraging open dialogue, Korach incites these two factions to take forceful action. Korach probably saw himself as the most suitable candidate to become the next national leader. To that end, he involves himself with each dissenting group. [Anyone familiar with political science (i.e. current events and/or world history) can easily relate to this phenomenon.]

Korach is simply what we would call a 'polished politician'. His true intention is to usurp political power. Towards that goal, he takes advantage of private interest groups.

A LESSON FOR ALL GENERATIONS

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:17) considers the rebellion of Korach as the paradigm of a dispute that was "sh'lo l'shem sha'mayim" (an argument not for the sake of Heaven).

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

Pirkei Avot may be teaching us the very same message that the Torah may allude to through its complex presentation of these

events. Precisely because Korach and his followers claim to be fighting "l'shem shamayim," Chazal must inform us of Korach's true intentions. Korach may claim to be fighting a battle "l'shem shamayim," but his claim is far from the truth. His primary interest is to promote himself, to build a power base from which he himself can emerge as the new leader.

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In 16:1-2, everyone is introduced: Korach, Danan, Aviram, and the 250 men. Read 16:2 carefully! Who are the leaders and famous people - just Korach, Danan, and Aviram, or also the 250 men? How does this question affect your understanding of the magnitude of the revolt against Moshe and Aharon?

B. Note the appellation with which Moshe opens his tfila: "kel elohei ha'RUCHOT l'chol BASAR" (16:22). Based on the context of this tfila, relate this appellation to the story of the "mitavim" and their punishment, as described in Bamidbar 11:1-35. How does the "basar" sent by the "ruach" in chapter 11 enable God to punish ONLY those who are truly guilty in the sin of the "mitavim"? [Note 11:33-34.]

Note that the only other use of this appellation is in Bamidbar 27:16, when Moshe asks God to appoint a leader to replace him. Relate that parsha and its context to Bamidbar 11:14-17!

C. Although Korach challenges the 'kehuna' and the political leadership for the wrong reasons, many generations later his great-grandson, Shmuel Ha'Navi, repeats this very same reform for the correct reasons. He challenges the corrupt 'kehuna' of Eli's sons, Chofni & Pinchas, and then later reforms the political leadership of the country by becoming a shofet and later establishing the nation's first monarchy.

1. Note the similarities between Parshat Korach and this week's Haftara, especially Shmuel 12:3. See also 3:19-20, 7:3-17.
2. What similarities exist between Shmuel and Moshe & Aharon?
3. In what manner does Shmuel, who is a Levi, act like a Kohen? (Relate to Shmuel 3:1-3, 13:8-12)

D. In earlier shiurim (Yom Kippur and Parshat Tzaveh), we discussed the special nature of the ktoret and its purpose as a protection from the consequences of "hitgalut shchinah". Recall also the events which led to the death of Nadav & Avihu.

1. Why do you think Moshe suggests that the 250 men offer ktoret as proof that they are chosen? Is this his idea or God's? (16:5-7) See Ramban (as usual).

2. Do you think Moshe is aware of the potential outcome- the consumption of all 250 men by fire, or was he merely trying to convince them to withdraw from Korach's revolt?

Relate your answer to your answer to question #1.

3. Why do you think the nation immediately accuses Moshe of causing their death (see 17:6-15)? Why is 'davka' the ktoret used to save the people from their punishment?
4. Why do you think 'davka' this type of punishment is necessary?

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Before reading this question, which 'mateh' did you think Moshe used to hit the rock at "mei m'riva"?

Now look carefully at 20:8-11.

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