

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**K**orach had a point. "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). 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 G-d 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? Surely the people needed no other leader than G-d Himself?

Did not Samuel warn 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" (1 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 halakhic 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 [colored] material, one string of blue wool exempts it [from the obligation of techeleth], 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 comment 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 G-d 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 G-d. 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

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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 that "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 G-d for this time. The priest spoke the word of G-d 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 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 G-d (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 G-d and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites" (Deut. 17: 19-20; and see Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 2: 6).

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

A leader need not be a better instrumentalist, actor or player than those he leads. His role is different. He must co-ordinate, give structure and shape to the enterprise, make sure that everyone is following the same script, travelling in the same direction, acting as

an ensemble rather than a group of prima donnas. He has to have a vision and communicate it. At times he has to 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, 21: 25). That is what happens when there is no leadership.

The Torah, and Tanakh as a whole, has a marvellous, memorable way of putting this. Moses' highest honour is that he is called eved Hashem, "the servant of G-d." He is called this, once on his death (Deut. 34: 5), and no less than eighteen times in Tanakh 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 G-d'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 G-d, the more there is of G-d. 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 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 G-d, not of the people; but neither is he their master. Only G-d 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 Tanakh 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 has no place in Judaism. We are all called on to be G-d'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 reminders that we are a holy nation, who then will we become, and why? © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he litany of disappointments and failures, of the generation of Jews that left Egyptian bondage, continues in this week's parsha. Except, this parsha relates to us not so much in describing a direct confrontation with G-d and His express wishes, so to speak, but rather tells of a challenge to Moshe and his authority to lead the Jewish people. Korach essentially engages in a coup, a power-grabbing attempt to replace Moshe from his leadership role and Aharon from his position as the High Priest of Israel.

Throughout the ages, the Torah scholars and commentators of the Jewish people have attempted to appreciate and understand what Korach's true motivations were, to engage in such a clearly suicidal attempt. After all, Korach was also aware that Moshe's countenance radiated Heavenly light that forced him to mask that countenance when dealing with human beings.

Korach was also undoubtedly aware that the High Priesthood and its incense offerings could be deadly to those not entitled to serve in that public role. Again, he saw his relatives, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon struck down by a heavenly fire, for overstepping their proper bounds in the ritual service of the Mishkan.

So what drove Korach to knowingly risk his life in this doomed and completely unnecessary confrontation with Moshe and Aharon? In the words of Rashi in this week's parsha: "What did Korach see or think that drove him to commit such a foolish act?" That question has puzzled all of Jewish scholarship for millennia.

It would be brazen of me to say that I somehow have the answer to this deeply troubling question. Nevertheless, I do wish to contribute an insight into the narrative as it appears in the parsha. Like many ideologues, Korach is convinced that G-d agrees with him - that G-d also has realized that Moshe is too autocratic and given to nepotism in his rule of the people. He saw that even Aharon and Miriam were willing to criticize Moshe, and even though Miriam was punished, the precedent of being able to criticize Moshe was set and established.

Korach may have thought that Miriam was punished because, in essence, she and Aharon were interfering in Moshe's private personal life. But Korach believed that he was embarking on a national crusade to break the power of autocratic rule over the Jewish people. On such a vital national issue, one where he believed himself to be morally and practically

undoubtedly correct, he convinced himself that G-d was also in agreement, so to speak, with him.

And, when one is convinced that his own thinking represents G-d's opinion on any given matter or issue then there can be no holding back in pursuing one's goals. The one main cause for all religious strife, wars, bans and exclusivity of opinion and actions, is the belief that G-d also follows that given opinion or belief. Naturally, Korach's personal ambitions and agenda helped convince him that G-d was on his side in the dispute with Moshe. One should always be wary not to confuse personal wishes and opinions with G-d's will. © 2012 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**I**n this week's Torah portion, the situation in the desert goes from bad to worse, from the refusal of the Israelites to conquer Israel (the sin of the scouts) to an actual mutiny against Moses their leader. Why would so many Israelites ignore the many miracles of the exodus and display such ingratitude to their leader? After all, Moses took an oppressed and enslaved people and - at enormous personal sacrifice - forged them into a G-d-enthused, sensitive, responsible and independent nation! Why rebel against Moses?

To deepen our enquiry, it would appear that there were two rebellions, not just one and two different causes for rebellion, at that. The key to understanding what really caused the desert mutinies emanates from an insight expressed by the medieval Biblical commentator, the Ibn Ezra, who picks up on the fact that there were two different punishments meted out to the rebels: "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up" one group, (Numbers 16:32) and "fire came forth from the Lord and devoured the 250 bearers of incense" (Numbers 16:35), the other group.

There is even a difference of opinion as to which group Korach belonged! "...There are those who say that Korach was amongst those swallowed up by the earth ... and there are those who say that he was burnt to death ...It is my opinion that only Dan and Aviram were swallowed up by the earth and Korach (was burnt together with) the incense bearers.." (Ibn Ezra to Numbers 16:35).

Let us revisit the Biblical text and attempt to reconstruct what actually occurred. Korach may have couched his words in the palatable and persuasive tones of democracy, but he was more a demagogue than a democrat.

"It's enough for you,' he ranted, "because the entire congregation are all holy and G-d is in their midst; why do you raise yourselves up above the assembly of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3).

His major rebellion is against Aaron; he wants to be the High Priest! Moses sees through his words. Moses actually charges the rebel with "seeking also the priesthood" and casting aspersions against Aaron! (Numbers 16:5-11). Therefore, he challenges Korach to offer up censers with incense as a sacrifice to G-d, an act which is ordinarily a priestly responsibility.

This will also explain why the famed Rebbe of Kotzk refers to Korach as the "holy grandfather". After all, Korach was only seeking a closer relationship to G-d, a more central role in the Divine service. He, like Nadav and Avihu (the sons of Aaron) before him, wished only to bring an offering to the Lord - even if he hadn't been commanded to do so. He aspired to sanctity - but refused to accept the fact that there were divine limits upon the sacred, that one must be deemed worthy to come close to the Divine. And so Korach and his band of followers are consumed by a fire sent by G-d - the very punishment meted out to Nadav and Avihu, for a very similar reason. (Leviticus 10:1-3, and Rashi ad loc).

Although Datan and Aviram banded together with Korach, they had an entirely different agenda. They (at least according to the Midrash) were long-time opponents of Moses' authority as well of his religio-political agenda. They never wanted to leave Egypt, nor do they now wish to leave the desert for the Land of Israel. They were the two fighting Israelites who Moses encountered at the very beginning of his career. They refused to accept his chastisement responding, "Who appointed you as minister and judge over us: do you wish to slay us as you slew the Egyptian? (Exodus 2:14). They resented Moses' having taken command, and they were perfectly content to remain in Egypt and "cooperate" with Pharaoh's policies. Having been forced to swallow - Moses' leadership when he returned from Midian, they now try to utilize the victory of the ten scouts to depose Moses for good.

Moses recognizes the fact that Datan and Aviram's agenda is different from that of Korach; they are rebelling against him and his rule, not against Aaron. He therefore asks to meet them separately (Numbers 16:12). They refuse to come, saying: "Was it not enough that you took us out of the land flowing with milk and honey (Egypt, for them, is the land flowing with milk and honey) to die in the desert that you also wish to rule over us . . ." (Numbers 16:13). And when the punishment of the opening of the earth to devour the sinners is being executed, the Bible emphasizes that Moses and the elders come to Datan and Aviram (Numbers 16:25). They may have lived near Korach, but this is their only connection to him. And it is them and their families who are swallowed up by the earth - not Korach! (Numbers 16:26-35) They received their just punishment; disappearing into the earth because it was the fruitfulness of the land of Egypt and the materialism of the earthly existence which led to their

rebellion against a prophet of G-d. © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**“K**orach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of K'has, the son of Levi" (Bamidbar 16:1). Rashi, quoting Chazal, says that when the Torah listed Korach's ancestors, it stopped before Ya'akov because he (Ya'akov) had asked G-d for his name not to be associated with Korach and his rebellion (B'raishis 49:6). There is much discussion about Ya'akov's request, including why the Torah would have otherwise listed Korach's great-great-grandfather, if the scriptural norm is to only trace an individual's lineage back to his Tribe (see Rashi on Vayikra 24:11), not to the forefathers.

Several commentators suggest that this is why Rashi, and the Midrashim he is based on, continue by pointing out that in Divray HaYamim I (6:23) Korach's lineage is traced all the way to Yisroel (aka Ya'akov), in order to show that the limit of how far back a person's ancestry is given is not which Tribe he is from, thereby requiring an explanation for Ya'akov's name being omitted here (i.e. that it would have been included if not for Ya'akov's request). However, as Mizrachi points out (B'raishis 49:6 and Bamidbar 16:1), the question should really be why Levi's father is mentioned in Divray HaYamim, not why he isn't mentioned in Parashas Korach.

When the Talmud (Sanhedrin 109b) discusses Korach's rebellion, a play on words is used for each of the names of his ancestry, thereby depicting how awful Korach was. The Talmud then asks why Ya'akov's name wasn't mentioned too, since a similar play on words could be made with his name as well, answering that his name was left out because Ya'akov had asked not to be included in "their gathering." Nachal Yaakov (B'raishis 49:6) and Maskil L'Dovid (Bamidbar 16:1) suggest that even though normally scripture only traces ancestry to the Tribe a person belongs to, since Ya'akov's name would have been used to denigrate Korach, an exception would have been made if not for Yaakov's prayer. This approach assumes that the names of Korach's ancestors were listed in order to denigrate him, whether via the name wordplay or by pointing out how evil he was despite his righteous ancestry (see Maharal's Chidushay Agados). If, however, the names were listed because this is the way the Torah wants to identify him, with the denigration through the names of his ancestors only done as a result of how the Torah identifies him, Ya'akov's name wouldn't have been mentioned (as people aren't usually identified by mentioning any of the forefathers), and there would be no reason for Ya'akov to request that it not be.

There might be a different reason why Ya'akov was concerned that his name might be mentioned regarding Korach's rebellion (or a similar circumstance), based on what he had been through with his brother Eisav. Despite Eisav being the firstborn-and therefore having the birthright, which included performing the religious services for the family-Ya'akov purchased the birthright from him, and did so in a manner that could be misunderstood as taking advantage of Eisav when he was vulnerable (tired and famished and willing to do almost anything for some nourishment, see <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/toldos.pdf>). It is therefore quite conceivable that Ya'akov was afraid that if there was ever a power struggle amongst his descendants, a fight over who had religious authority, he would be blamed for passing on this tendency. After all, wasn't Korach just following in the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather when he insisted that he should be the Kohain Gadol rather than Aharon? Once Ya'akov prayed that any rebellion against religious authority not be attributed to him-that he not be associated with such a situation, so that any "machlokes" (bitter disagreement) not be blamed on his having such a deficiency-the Torah wouldn't have included him in a list of Korach's ancestors for any reason. Therefore, when the Talmud discusses the possibility of mentioning Ya'akov in order to denigrate Korach, it tells us that this wasn't a possibility, as it was preempted by Ya'akov's prayer.

Although I have not (as of yet) come across any commentator that makes this precise suggestion, I did (subsequently) see that Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, z"l, in *Oznayim LaTorah*, suggests that Ya'akov's fear was that Korach himself would use Ya'akov's getting the birthright from Eisav as a precedent for the rights/privilege of religious service being transferred, and argue that going after it was admirable; after all, he was just following in the footsteps of Ya'akov Avinu. Rather than Ya'akov's fear being that Korach's deficiency would be attributed to him, Rav Sorotzkin's suggestion is that Ya'akov's dealings with Eisav would have been used by Korach and his followers to undermine Moshe and Aharon's authority-had Ya'akov not prayed that such an argument wouldn't occur to them. Although this is not the same suggestion I am making, he did connect what Ya'akov did to Eisav with what Korach tried to do to Moshe and Aharon; boruch she'kivanti (sort of).

[As far as why Yaakov (or, more precisely, Yisroel) was included in the list of ancestors in *Divray HaYamim*, it's possible that one might have thought that since Haimun, the Levi who descended from K'has and was one of their leaders in the Temple, was a descendent of Korach's, he was not as respectable or worthy as the other Levi'im in his position. Therefore, when Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly wrote *Divray HaYamim* (see Rashi on I 1:1), they traced his ancestry all the way back to Ya'akov, indicating that

there was no reason for Ya'akov to not want to be associated with him.] © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

The story of Korach's rebellion contains echoes of the golden calf narrative. Each involves insurrection. In the golden calf episode, the Jews aspire to replace Moshe (Moses). (Exodus 32:1) In the Korach story, Aharon's (Aaron) priesthood is also challenged. (Numbers 16:10)

The relationship between these two episodes is pointed out by the Ibn Ezra. Following the golden calf incident, the privilege to lead the temple service was removed from the firstborn. Korach, being a firstborn himself (Exodus 6:21), along with two hundred fifty other firstborn, revolts after the first sacrificial service in the Temple, when Korach most deeply feels his exclusion.

Interestingly, in both incidents, Aharon and Moshe react differently. Aharon is the peacemaker who attempts to calmly bring relief to an explosive situation.

Thus, in the golden calf event, Aharon instructs the people to bring gold from which he fashions the golden calf. (Exodus 32:2- 4) Rather than confronting the Israelites, a tactic Aharon felt would fail, Aharon decides to bide for time, in the hope that Moshe would soon return. He declares, "A festival for the Lord tomorrow," (Exodus 32:5) predicting that by the morrow, the people would change their ways and worship G-d.

In the Korach story, Aharon plays a similar role. Placing incense upon his fire pan, he once again acts as a peacemaker, and stops the plague that killed thousands subsequent to the punishment of Korach. (Numbers 17:11-14) In fact, it is Aharon's staff that blossoms and sprouts, proving in the most powerful, yet peaceful, way, that G-d had given the tribe of Levi the role of ritual leadership. (Numbers 17:23)

Moshe, on the other hand is far more aggressive. Without a prior command from G-d, he shatters the tablets in reaction to the golden calf. (Exodus 32:19)

In the Korach episode, Moshe acts similarly. Without a word from G-d, Moshe declares that the earth would open up and swallow Korach and his cohorts. The earth does just that. (Numbers 16:30-32)

What emerges from these two episodes are two different ways to deal with communal crisis. Aharon's approach is one of calm, quiet diplomacy. Moshe's style is bold, strident, pointed and even militant.

Throughout history, Jews, when facing challenges, have debated which of these two philosophies - Aharon's or Moshe's - is more valid. These discussions are still very much alive, as we are faced daily with barrages on the safety of Jews in Israel and in other places in the world.

From my perspective, it would seem that since both approaches are found in the Torah, we learn that each has value. It can be argued that both of these tactics strengthen the other - both quiet diplomacy and public protest yield results. On the one hand, you need those on the inside, working within the organized system to effect change. On the other hand, it is public protest that is the fuel that allows quiet diplomacy to work. © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Korach relates the story of Korach, Datan, Aviram and 250 members of the shevet (tribe) or Reuven challenging Moshe's choice for Kohen Gadol (high priest). The end result was that the 250 members were burned by a heavenly fire, and the other 3 were miraculously swallowed by the earth. From a motive perspective, Korach makes the most sense, because he felt slighted for not having been chosen himself. But why would 250 people follow him to their certain death, with apparently little to gain?

The answer can be found in Rashi, the great medieval commentator, who writes that just as Korach's family camped on the southern side of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), so did the tribe of Reuven. Rashi quotes the words of Chapters of the Fathers, "woe to an evil person, and woe to his neighbor." The 250 people met their death, simply because they were influenced by their neighbors! This points to the awesome influence that friends, neighbors and associates have on us. So who do we surround ourselves with? Do we have positive friends and neighbors? Are WE positive friends and neighbors to others? © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

**MACHON ZOMET**

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

**I**n his book *Orot*, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook draws a connection between Korach's attitude and Kayin's sin. Kayin thought that "it is possible to let all the filth remain in the world, all the physical vulgarity and all the evil inclinations that are part of the vulgar body... and to raise it all up to the level of the joy of holiness." He felt that a person who is naturally inclined to murder can offer a sacrifice and approach G-d without any need for purification. And that is why G-d did not accept his Mincha sacrifice, so as not to justify Kayin's actions, and in order to teach humanity that a moral effort is needed in order to reach a holy state.

The Rav continues, "The trait of Kayin in humanity in general led to Korach within Yisrael." What

Kayin did in humanity is the same as what Korach did in Yisrael. Korach's declaration, that "All the people of the community are holy" [Bamidbar 16:3], makes a mockery of the effort required to rise up from the secular to the holy. If everybody is holy, then all the people are at the same spiritual level as Moshe, and the secular is just the same as the holy one. And this led to the development of the religion which turns to all the nations who are wallowing in the depths of impurity and tells them, "You are all holy, you are all children of G-d, there is no difference between one nation and another." This is the human trait of a Korachite, which is the modern version of Kayan and the source of worldly suffering."

What is needed to raise the secular world is a deep and basic uplifting as a result of a labor of refinement. Those who think that merely talking is sufficient to lift up all of the secular world are - as it were - trying to "jump" into the Garden of Eden, still carrying along with them all of their evil and their negative traits.

The scouts held an opposite viewpoint. They felt that in order to become holy it is necessary to flee from the secular, and they therefore refused to enter Eretz Yisrael and preferred to remain in the shadow of the Clouds of Glory and to eat food provided directly by heaven.

Judaism does not promote fleeing from the secular world, as the scouts did, and it does not declare that the secular is holy, as Korach did. Rather, it wants to lift up the secular world to a holy level. This is the mission of Yisrael among the nations and of the Kohanim within Yisrael - to remain separate from the others and thereby to lift up the rest of the community.

This viewpoint is seen in the mitzva of tzitzit. It is written in the Sefer Hachinuch:

"The color white is a hint of the body, made of earth, created from snow... The blue techelet is reminiscent of the soul, which comes from the upper world ... The sages taught us that the color of the techelet is like that of the sea, and sea is like the heavens, and the heavens are like the Divine Throne ... And that is why a thread of techelet is wound around the white threads - in order to cover the secular with the holy."

It is thus no surprise to see that Korach claimed that a garment made entirely of techelet has no need of tzitzit, since such a garment is completely holy on its own.

The leaders of our nation did the right thing when they used the colors blue and white for the national flag, thereby hinting that the objective of the nation is to combine earth and heaven. This is similar to what appears in the Midrash, that Yissachar's banner was blue and Zevulun's banner was white, and that the proper blend is a combination of the two colors. And that explains why the passage of tzitzit is at the end of this week's Torah portion, separating between the story

of the scouts and that of Korach. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

**RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## Parsha Insights

**T**his weeks parsha, Korach, deals with concepts that I feel are very pertinent to the challenge of staying strong in a non-Torah environment.

"Vayikach Korach (16:1)", and Korach took. What did he take!? Rashi explains that he took himself, he separated himself from Klal Yisroel in order to challenge Moshe's authority.

The Yerushalmi takes this even further and explains that Korach became an apikorus, denying the divine origin of the Torah and the prophecy of Moshe.

We are all familiar with people who either deny that the Torah is G-d given or who have serious doubts on the matter. The common claims are: "if I heard Hashem speak, I'd also be religious"; "if I had stood at Sinai I'd have no problems believing".

How then can we understand a Korach who stood at Har Sinai and heard Hashem speak yet still denied?!

A similar question was posed to the Steipler zt"l and he gave the following answer. If one has desires to go against the Torah, then he will manage to find a way to challenge the Torah itself. No one wants to live a life that contradicts what they know is right. If they're not willing to change their lifestyle, they'll have to modify their life beliefs.

Korach, blinded by his quest for honor, felt he had to challenge Moshe. How can one challenge the quintessential prophet of Hashem? Simple. Declare that he's not a prophet! At that point, even Moshe becomes fair game!

Having grown up in the modern orthodox circles of NY, having been a 'Neveh guy' myself and having been involved with Neveh in varying capacities for the past 14 years, I've witnessed the same pattern over and over. The overwhelming majority of those who aren't observant before Israel and those who have difficulty maintaining that which they had learned while in Israel, aren't besieged with philosophical difficulties in Judaism. That isn't where the problem begins! The origin is that it doesn't fit into that which they want to do. Ultimately, denial of Judaism's validity is the only way to be able to look oneself in the mirror each morning.

There is a story of a talmid of Rav Chaim, the Brisker Ruv, who left his rebbe, went to university, studied and became a professor of philosophy. Along the way he became completely irreligious. Years later he returned to Brisk to speak to Rav Chaim. He wanted to ask Rav Chaim to explain how Judaism dealt with certain questions that he had.

Before he could begin, Rav Chaim had a question of his own. "Did you first have these questions

and then become irreligious, or did you first become irreligious and then have these questions?"

The professor thought for a moment and then answered that he had first become irreligious and then was troubled by these questions.

"In that case", Rav Chaim told him, "there is no point in my answering you. One can only answer a question. But these aren't questions... these are answers! They are answers to your lifestyle, they are rationalizations for the path you have chosen. No, one cannot answer an answer!"

What did Moshe 'answer' to Korach? "Boker v'yoda Hashem-in the morning Hashem will make known who is His (16:5)." On a simple level, Moshe was giving them time until the morning to recognize and correct their error (Ohr HaChaim). If they'd persist, Hashem would show them that Moshe had been acting according to His will and instructions.

We know that this world is compared to night, and olam habah, the world to come, is compared to day. The Mesilas Yeshorim explains that at night our vision and perception are distorted. We often don't see things that are there. Even more dangerous is our seeing things and not realizing what they are. A pillar is seen as a man, a man as a pillar.

In the darkness of this world our perception and priorities are distorted. Something that is vitally important is seen as discardable and inconvenient. Something of no lasting value, or even dangerously destructive, is viewed as desirable and important.

Boker v'yoda Hashem! In the morning, in the blinding light of clarity manifested by the next world, there will be no doubts! All of the 'problems' will vanish in the 'boker'.

A parable is given of a group of people lost in a forest on a cold, rainy night. They desperately want to reach the road, but are confused which is the correct direction. One swears that they have to push forward in order to reach the road. Another swears that going forward will only lead them deeper into the forest. They must turn around and work their way back in order to reach the road. In the dark confusion of the night, each is so convinced that he's correct that he refuses to budge in the other direction. Finally, as the sun begins to light the horizon, the road becomes clearly visible in front of them. That very person who was swearing on his mother's life that to move forward would mean death, points the way forward! Boker v'yoda Hashem!

As a teenager, a friend and I had the honor of spending a shabbos with Rav Hillel Zaks shlit"a, the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron and the grandson of the Chofetz Chaim. My friend and I were at the stage that we realized the importance of learning, but had difficulty with the idea of maximizing any available seconds to grab in valuable words of Torah. We had a much more 'laid back' approach to life and learning...

As we were walking back from shul shabbos afternoon, as if he had read our minds, Rav Hillel began

to address that very issue. "Guys, you have to realize that every word of Torah changes our neshama. It doesn't change it from an orange to a grapefruit... it changes it from a peanut to a watermelon! Right now, with the physical covering of our bodies, no one can see that change. But when the moshiach will come, he will tear open everyone's chest and reveal that neshama. At that point it will become clear what was the value of every second!"

Boker v'yoda Hashem!

May we merit to use our time here in a valuable way, involving ourselves in the Torah that will give us the clarity to see things in their proper perspective. Not being drawn by the scurrying of all those around us, rationalizing away our behavior, but rather pointing ourselves deliberately toward that boker. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

“**T**hey fell on their faces and said, 'O G-d, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You will be angry with the entire assembly?'” (16:22)

Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma: "Whereupon G-d replied, 'You have spoken well! I know and shall make known who has sinned and who has not sinned'."

What does this mean? asks R' David Halevi z"l (known as the "Taz" after his work Turei Zahav ; 1586-1667). Did Moshe best G-d in an argument and change G-d's mind?

No! he explains. Rather, Rashi's comment should be understood as follows: The Mishnah (Avot 4:5) teaches, "Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka said, 'If one desecrates the Name of Heaven in secret-the Heavenly Court will exact punishment from him in public. Unintentional and intentional-both are alike regarding the desecration of the Name'." What does this mean? Does G-d really punish for an unintentional sin just like an intentional sin?

The Taz explains: The second half of the Mishnah is answering a question one might ask on the first half of the Mishnah. If one who desecrated G-d's Name in secret is punished in public, won't that cause a further desecration of G-d's Name, for it will appear that an innocent man has been punished? Therefore, if one desecrates G-d's Name in private, G-d forces him to commit the same "sin" again in public-except that it is not really a sin because it was not voluntary. Then, G-d punishes the sinner for the first sin (the private one) while everyone assumes, wrongly, that he is being punished for the second sin (the public one).

Returning to our verse and Rashi's comment, the Taz explains: Hashem knew that thousands of Bnei Yisrael had supported Korach in their hearts. But no one else knew that, and if Hashem had punished those

silent sympathizers, the rest of the nation would have said, "Shall one man sin, and You will be angry with the entire assembly?" When Moshe pointed out this potential desecration of G-d's Name, Hashem answered, "You have spoken well! There will be no desecration of G-d's Name, for I know who sinned, and it is My way to make known who has sinned and who has not sinned."

When did Hashem make known who the Korach-sympathizers were? In the verse (17:6), "The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael complained on the morrow against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You have killed the people of Hashem!'" (Divrei David)

"Aharon took [a pan with coals and incense] as Moshe had spoken and ran to the midst of the congregation, and behold! the plague had begun among the people. He placed the incense and provided atonement for the people. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked." (17:12-13)

Why did the offering of ketoret / incense stop the plague? R' Moshe Isserles z"l (1520-1572; Krakow, Poland; known as "Rema") explains:

The ketoret consisted of eleven spices, of which four are mentioned in the Torah, and three other ingredients, for a total of 14. The number four represents the four camps of Bnei Yisrael. Eleven represents all of the tribes except Levi and Yehuda, both of whom had a special status. Fourteen represents the eleven tribes plus kohanim, levi'im and the tribe of Yehuda. When the ketoret was burnt on the altar, a miracle occurred and the smoke did not disperse. Instead, it rose straight up, which represents the good deeds of Bnei Yisrael rising Heavenward and also represents the unity of the Jewish People. Along these lines, our Sages say that the ketoret contained one foul-smelling herb, symbolizing that the Jewish People are not a complete unit unless even the sinners are included.

The Gemara teaches that the kohanim would talk while crushing the spices for the ketoret because "kol" / sound improves the spices. This cannot be taken literally, Rema writes. Rather, the crushing of the spices represents the suffering of Bnei Yisrael in exile, which strengthens the "kol Yaakov" / the sound of Torah.

In light of all this, we can understand why the ketoret would cause the plague to end, i.e., because ketoret represents all that is good about the Jewish People-their unity, their good deeds, and their adherence to Torah and Torah study, even in the midst of exile. We also can see why Aharon, of all people, was the one to check the progress of the plague, since he was the one who constantly pursued unity between friends, between spouses, and among the Jewish People in general. Korach and his cohorts pursued the opposite and therefore were punished through ketoret. (Torat Ha'olah, II ch. 36) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org