

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Korach rebellion was an unholy alliance of individuals and groups unhappy 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, Datan 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, and some of his descendants felt that they should have been accorded seniority. Then there were the two hundred and fifty "princes of the congregation, elect men of the assembly, men of renown" 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 a change, plus c'est la mme 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: 'This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea. If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt.'"

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 Tenakh: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them."

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 "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them"? 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 Bemidbar, when Moses asks G-d to choose the next leader of the Israelites. G-d tells him to take Joshua and appoint him as his successor: "So the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Elazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your splendour so that the whole Israelite community will obey him.'"

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 him "some of your 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."

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.

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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 G-d'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 dies, his power ends. When a prophet dies, his influence begins. Returning to Moses: he occupied two leadership roles, not one. On the one hand, though monarchy was not yet in existence, he 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 G-d. 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."

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 -- *vesamakhta et yadekha*, 'lay your hand' on him -- is still used today to describe rabbinic ordination: *semikhah*, 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. G-d 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 civilization of the West. People still contend for power. If only we would realize 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 humanizing truths. Not all of us have power, but we are all capable of being an influence for good. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Datan and Aviram went out erect at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, children and infants..." (Numbers 16:27,30) I have explained in a previous commentary on the biblical portion of Korah that there were a number of different political camps rebelling against Moses, each one with a different agenda. Even in their rebellious backsliding, the Israelites were bitterly and fractiously divided. One political party wished to remain in the desert, a second

group wished to return to Egypt and a third wished to rush up and conquer Israel immediately.

Those who supported immediate conquest probably did so in a desperate attempt to avert the punishment of death in the desert, despite the fact that the Israelites were without the ark of the Lord and were devoid of the spirit of G-d within their midst.

This last group of rebels, known as the "ma'apilim," was actually the first to act, and they received their punishment at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites, who struck them and pounded them into retreat (Numbers 14:45).

The opening verse of our portion mentions three ring-leaders: Korah, Datan and Aviram. Korah apparently led one faction and Datan and Aviram the other.

Our supposition regarding two separate and opposing factions emanates from the fact that the Bible delineates two separate groups of people and their distinctive punishments: "The ground which was under them [Datan and Aviram, their followers, wives and children; see 16:25,27] split open, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korah [but not Korah himself], and their entire wealth" (16:31,32). Then; only three verses later, a second punishment: "A fire came forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense" (16:35).

Our careful reading of these verses also enables us to identify the political agenda of each leader and his camp. When Datan and Aviram refuse Moses's request to appear before him, they offer the following argument: "Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the desert, must you also rule over us, yes, rule over us?" (16:13).

Note that they refer to Egypt - not the Land of Israel - as the land "flowing with milk and honey." They are apparently the instigators of the view that wishes to "appoint a leader and return to Egypt" (14:3), that believes, "it would have been better for us to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the desert" (Exodus 14:12). No wonder Rashi identifies Datan and Aviram as the two Hebrews at the beginning of the Book of Exodus who fought amongst themselves and rebuked Moses - who had just slain the Egyptian taskmaster who was slaying a Hebrew - for presuming to be a "ruler and judge over them." These two upstarts never wished to leave Egypt in the first place and they were punished by being swallowed by the ground.

Korah was the leader of the other faction, the bearers of the censers of incense. Moses reveals to us why Korah questioned Moses's leadership: "Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Israel has segregated you to perform the service of the Tabernacle [as a Levite], that you yet seek the priesthood as well?" (Numbers 16:8-10).

Korah wants to be a Kohen! When the Kotzker Rebbe refers to Korah as "the holy grandfather," he seems to attribute to him the highest motivations. He and his assemblage wish to be holy and they are desperately seeking a way to come closer to G-d.

So Moses tests them by inviting them to offer the priestly gift of incense - an offering which they, as Levites, had not been commanded to bring. They suffer the same fate as Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aaron, who also brought an uninvited sacrifice, and were consumed by Divine fire.

Apparently, zealotry in the service of G-d is not appreciated; it can lead, G-d forbid, to jihadism and shahidism - and must be nipped in the bud.

Korah reached up too high. He desired to remain in the rarefied, decision-less kollel atmosphere of the desert, refusing to sully his holy hands with the political necessities of creating a nation-state, with the military necessities of vanquishing Amalek and enthroning the G-d of compassionate righteous and moral justice throughout the world.

Datan and Aviram sunk too low, preferring mindless enslavement in Egypt to the difficult decisions and responsibilities of attempting to perfect the world in the Kingship of G-d. They did not think they were holy at all. They did not recognize the image of G-d within themselves, that portion of the Divine from on high which cries out to us from the deepest recesses of our souls, "Give me liberty or give me death; rebellion against tyrants is obedience to G-d." They became overwhelmed by the very earthiness they believed was the essence of their being, and couldn't even lift their heads above the darkness to see the light of human freedom and empowerment within their own souls.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

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

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

Both Korach and the spies masked their own personal drives for power and position with high-

sounding principles of public good, social justice and great concern for the future of the people of Israel. The very shrillness of their concern for the good of society itself calls attention to their true motives - they protested too much!

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

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

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

There is an adage in Jewish life that one should always respect others but also be wary of their true motives. Only regarding Moshe does the Torah testify that as the true servant of G-d, he is above criticism and suspicion. But ordinary mortals have ordinary failings and self-interest is one of those failings. Moshe is true and his Torah is true. After that, no matter how fetching the slogan or how glorious the promise, caution and wariness about the person and cause being advocated are the proper attitudes to embrace. © 2013 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

The Fruit of Foul Speech

“The men who produced the evil report about the Land died in a plague before Hashem.” Rashi: "The plague here means a special death appropriate to their sin. Measure for measure, their death mirrored their sin. Since they sinned with the tongue, their tongues elongated to their navels. From those stretched-out tongues exited worms, which then entered them through their navels."

Gur Aryeh: "Do not think for a moment that Chazal simply paint a grisly picture of the death of people who misused the organ of speech. All the details come together as a single, integrated concept, typical of the great wisdom of Chazal."

The key may be that the earth is an analogue to Man. Both the earth and Man bear fruit. In the case of typical agriculture, various plants that are rooted in the ground send forth stems that further ramify and elongate, giving rise to branches. Something similar happens in the early development of each human being. He is created, in a sense, through growing out and away from his navel, the place where he is connected to his mother.

The produce of the land is called *tevuah*. That word is connected to one of the Torah's expressions for verbal communication: "I create the *niv*/ speech of the lips." (Yeshayahu 57:19) The connection is affirmed by the Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim*, and is simple to understand. As produce is the fruit of the earth, speech is the fruit that Man gives forth.

Think of how a tree grows. From a root structure, the tree develops, elongates. Every new area of growth produces yet other areas of growth. Everything on the tree seems to develop further, sending out new growth beyond -- with one exception. If we consider the fruit the goal, so to speak, of the tree, we find the process of elongation arrested once it gets close to the end. Once the growth arrives at the structure that brings forth the fruit, we do not find any further elongation or ramification. All the growth seems oriented at delivering the fruit; the process of reaching out in all directions serves the cause of the fruit. Put simply, the body of the tree flourishes and expands; the fruit-structure narrowly produces within limits.

Now apply our analogy to speech. If words are the fruit, the tongue is the structure that houses and produces it. The organs that host the tongue and nurture it are comparable to the roots and branches of the tree. It is within their nature to grow and develop; the growth and elongation of the tongue is particularly inappropriate, because it is supposed to be narrowly focused on producing the fruit, not in flourishing, like the other structures.

So far, we've described a tongue doing its job. The *meraglim*, however, changed the script. Their tongues took on a new function -- dynamically flourishing, growing outside of the limits and boundaries of propriety, bursting forth with words that should never have been uttered. In other words, they turned the tongue into a flourisher, rather than a producer.

Human growth begins at the navel. The embryo sprouts, grows, flourishes, from there. If speech is the "fruit" of the human condition, then the distance between the navel and the tongue is the span between root and goal. When the *meraglim* so devastatingly mismanaged the power of speech, they reversed the roles of root and fruit, of flourisher and producer. They

turned the tongue into a flourisher -- which then flourished the exact distance ordinarily travelled between what should have been the root and the fruit. The tongue-flourisher now grew along the reverse route, stopping only at the navel, into which it injected its power.

Specifically, the tongue produced worms. Fruit that is still attached to its branch, trunk, and roots does not become wormy. When the fruit decays, worms begin to thrive. Decay usually does not occur when the fruit is meaningfully attached to the tree. When the *meraglim* turned their tongues into wild flourishers-without-limits, they altered the relationship between the tongue as producer and its ordinary support system. The tongue thus was denied its usual roots, allowing for decay. At the same time, a root system that cannot fulfill its design in support a producer loses its purpose. It, too, is open to decay -- and thus became a habitat for the worms of the unruly tongue.

We have thus discovered that the image projected by Chazal is neither arbitrary or bizarre, but ripe with meaning. Unlike the words of the *meraglim*, those of Chazal are always precise, measured, on target -- and full of Divine wisdom. (Based on Gur Aryeh, *Bamidbar* 14:37; *Nesivos Olam*, *Nesiv HaLashon*, chap. 10) © 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The controversy of Korach and his congregation--unlike the controversy of the scholars Hillel and Shammai - is a controversy not pursued in a Heavenly cause. It, therefore, does not endure. (Ethics 5:17) Why is Korach's disagreement with Moshe (Moses) so tainted?

Malbim, the 19th century commentary feels that the goal of the disagreement had impure intentions from the beginning. He therefore writes: "In a controversy pursued for unholy ends...even those who have come together on one side are not really united. Each is out to cut the other's throat."

Supporting Malbim's approach is the text in Ethics which describes the controversy as one that existed between Korach and his congregation, not Korach and Moshe. In other words, Korach's group was racked by dissension from within, each wanting the priesthood for himself.

Korach also refused to dialogue with Moshe. (Numbers 16:12) An essential principle of controversy for the sake of Heaven is the recognition that no single person has the monopoly on truth. Although one may be committed to a particular position, he or she must be open and respectful of dissenting views.

This is an essential ingredient in all spheres of leadership, especially in politics. Hearing-listening to the other is essential. The real challenge is not listening to

those who agree with us, but listening to those who do not. Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, a 16th century commentary offers a final idea. He notes that the text in Ethics states a controversy for Heaven will in the end-"sofah"-endure. In other words, when Hillel and Shammai disagreed they still wanted the halakhic system to endure, hence, their controversy was for the sake of Heaven. This, unlike Korach, whose purpose in disagreeing with Moshe was to destroy the system of the priesthood.

So, too, in Israeli politics. Rav Kuk states that the duly elected government of Israel has the status of malkhut, the biblical status of king. (Mishpat Kohen 144:14-17) Thus, an individual has the right to disagree with government policy, but can never regard those policies as null and void. Dissent is acceptable for it sustains the enduring nature of the State. Delegitimization, on the other hand, is not acceptable for it threatens the very fabric of the State.

If this distinction is blurred, if the government is declared illegitimate, the consequences are grievous. Citizens would then be able to take the law into their own hands and carve out their own conceptions of what they believe Jewish law demands. Let us pray that those in power and we ourselves realize the fine line between discourse that is destructive, selfish and fleeting and dissent for the sake of heaven, dissent that is constructive, productive, enduring and even holy. © 2011 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The rebellion had been quelled. The rebels were swallowed up alive by a giant sinkhole formed just for this purpose (Bamidbar 16:31-33). The political leaders who insisted on being religious leaders too were burnt by a fire sent by G-d to devour them (16:35). Many who had supported the rebellion perished in a plague (17:12-14). Aharon's blossoming staff proved that the Tribe of Levi had been chosen by G-d to serve in the Mishkan (17:23-24). After all of this, the nation still had one issue that concerned them, although they didn't complain about it (compare their "saying" their concern in 17:27 to their "complaining" in 17:6, and the lack of "congregating against Moshe and Aharon" as there had been in 6:3 and 16:19). What was their concern? Whomever tries to get too close to G-d (and His Mishkan) will perish (17:28). They had just seen people who seem to have wanted to increase their connection with G-d perish when they tried to get too close. How can a nation that is supposed to strive to get close to G-d avoid getting too close and suffering the consequences? G-d's answer was that the Tribe of Levi would "safeguard the Tent of Meeting" (a.k.a. the Mishkan) so that "a stranger," (anyone who doesn't

belong) "does not come close" (18:4). By making the priestly class responsible for the sanctity of the Mishkan, including forbidding entry to those who shouldn't be there, this concern was addressed.

Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel, sh'lita, author of "Machatz Shel Yad," shared with me a question he posed in his Chumash shiur. Since the Levi'im being the guards of the Mishkan had already been established (1:53; see Rashi on 3:6), what was being added here that would alleviate what the nation was concerned about? They must have known that this task had been assigned to the Levi'im, as the next verse (1:54) says that the Children of Israel fulfilled everything that had been commanded. How could the role of "Mishkan security guard" be presented as if it was a newly added responsibility if it had been included in their assignments well before Korach's rebellion? Chizkuni (18:1) seems to be addressing this issue when he explains G-d's message to Moshe and Aharon to be that the nation's concern was not justified, as the Levi'im are already responsible for preventing unauthorized access. However, this doesn't explain why they were concerned in the first place and/or how they were no longer concerned, since nothing had really changed.

Ibn Ezra uses this question to support his opinion that Korach's rebellion occurred earlier, at Mt. Sinai, when the Mishkan was first built and the Levi'im replaced the firstborn. According to him, the responsibility to prevent unauthorized access described in 1:53 was the result of this concern; we just weren't told how it came about until now. However, Ibn Ezra's position that the rebellion happened at Mt. Sinai is very difficult to accept. Not only does its placement in the narrative strongly indicate that it occurred well after the nation left Sinai, but Dasan and Aviram's words, attacking Moshe for taking them "out of a land flowing with milk and honey" (perversely referring to Egypt) "to kill us in the desert" (16:13) makes little sense if the decree that the generation would die in the desert, issued after the sin of the spies, hadn't been made yet.

The answer Rabbi Frankel shared with his shiur was from Reb Asher Pillar, an answer that I like very much. Yes, the Levi'im had already been given the responsibility of making sure no one gets too close to G-d's Mishkan, but they had failed miserably. Not only did people perish as a result of the rebellion because they crossed the line of what they should/could do, but Levi'im were a primary force behind this rebellion. How could the nation be confident that the line wouldn't be crossed again if those responsible to protect against it happening had proven to be inadequate? Who watches the watchmen? Therefore, another layer added. Instead of the Levi'im being in charge of this responsibility, now the Kohanim were given the responsibility of overseeing the Levi'im. "You (Aharon), and your sons and your father's house with you, will bear the iniquity of the Temple" (18:1). With the Kohanim being the Levi'im's

new bosses, the nation could be confident that a similar lapse in fulfilling their responsibility wouldn't occur. Abarbanel may take this a bit further, suggesting (I think) that the responsibility of the Kohanim was more than just overseeing the Levi'im, but that they (and those Levi'im who failed to fulfill their role) would personally "bear the iniquity," i.e. be liable for punishment. If the nation's concern was that they would continue to die for overstepping the boundary, placing the punishment for inadvertent "overstepping" on those who should have prevented it would certainly alleviate this concern.

There is another aspect of G-d's "answer" to the nation's concern that is quite puzzling. Usually, G-d spoke to Moshe (sometimes with Aharon) with instructions to share the communication with the rest of the nation. Here, even though this divine communication is apparently a response to the nation's concern, it is addressed only to Aharon (through Moshe, see Rashi), without any instructions (or indication, except for the fact that the content relates directly to them) that it should be shared with the rest of the nation. I would have expected G-d's answer to the nation, which included laws that affected them directly (the "gifts" they must give to the Kohanim and Levi'im), to be addressed to them. Instead, it is addressed to Aharon. Why was this "answer," and these laws, given over in such a roundabout way?

Included in the "gifts" taught after the nation expressed their concern about coming too close to G-d's Mishkan was "ma'aser," the tithe that had to be given to the Levi'im (18:21). Although it had been referenced at Mt Sinai (Vayikra 27:30), all we are told there is that it "belongs to G-d;" that G-d designated it for the Levi'im is taught to us here. Although "ma'aser" must be given to a Levi, which Levi it is given to is completely up to each farmer (see Rashi on Bamidbar 5:10). Would anyone give the "ma'aser" from their crops to a Levi who was being derelict in his Levitical obligations? I would suggest that besides adding a managerial level on top of the Levi'im to ensure that they fulfill their responsibility, there was another "layer" added, a motivational one. Knowing that their livelihood was dependant on being chosen as a "ma'aser" recipient, the Levi'im would make sure to do their job and prevent any further catastrophe from happening. And knowing that this was in the best interest of the Levi'im, it alleviated the nation's concern that this function wouldn't be performed properly. However, it would be inappropriate to directly connect the two, to address the nation's concern by saying that they had leverage over the Levi'im since they could choose which Levi would get their "ma'aser." By giving this information to Aharon, who would make sure that the laws would be properly implemented, the nation's concern could be addressed without doing so overtly.

This point is made when the Torah states (as part of G-d's communication with Aharon) that the

Levi'im get "ma'aser" as payment for their work in the Mishkan (18:21), which refers to all of their "jobs," not just being security guards. That this has implications which ease the nation's concern is made quite clear by the next verse, which states that as a result of "ma'aser" being given to the Levi'im, "the Children of Israel will no longer get too close to the Tent of Meeting" (18:22). Besides having the Kohanim overseeing their functions, the Levi'im have to (indirectly) answer to the rest of the nation too. And once these additions were in place, there was no longer the same concern that there would be continuous punishment for getting too close to G-d's Mishkan. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

The parsha contains the story of the "wood chopper," who was a Sabbath desecrator. (There is a disagreement in Tractate Shabbos as to which form of forbidden labor he performed). Inasmuch as the punishment for Chillul Shabbos was not yet known, he was put in confinement until Hashem clarified for Moshe that the punishment was stoning. The punishment was indeed carried out: "The entire assembly removed him to the outside of the camp; they pelted him with stones and he died, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." [Bamidbar 15:36].

Immediately following that story, the Torah continues with the section relating to the mitzvah of wearing Tzitzis on four cornered garments. We may ask -- what is the significance of this juxtaposition?

There is an interesting insight mentioned in the Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu. When Moshe saw the Shabbos desecration of the wood chopper, he told Hashem: "During the week, Jews wear Tefillin and that serves as a reminder for them to observe the mitzvos. On Shabbos, when they do not wear Tefillin, they forget to keep Your commandments." G-d responded to Moshe by telling him that He was going to give a new mitzvah that applied every day of the week and would also serve as a reminder of the mitzvos -- the mitzvah of wearing fringes on the corners of one's garments.

The Orach HaChaim HaKadosh writes that this idea fits in well with the fact that the parsha of Tzitzis is introduced with the phrase "Vayomer Hashem el Moshe laymor" (And G-d SAID to Moshe) instead of the far more customary introductory phrase "Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe laymor" (And G-d SPOKE to Moshe). The word "vayomer" connotes a softer, more conciliatory, type of communication than the harsher "vayedaber". According to the Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu, this fits in beautifully. Moshe had a complaint, so to speak, against the Almighty. Hashem was responding to Moshe's objection with a new mitzvah that would "solve his problem" -- the mitzvah of Tzitzis.

However, there is a technical problem with this nice homiletic idea. In order for the wood chopper to be

liable to stoning, the person had to be warned that he was in violation of the Shabbos and subject to a capital penalty. It is not possible for him to have merely "forgotten" the commandment. If he truly forgot the commandment, it would be a "shogeg" and for an unintentional violation of the Shabbos, one merely brings a sin offering, rather than being stoned. According to one opinion in the Gemara, the violator must actually respond, "I am doing this act on condition that I am given the death penalty!" So what kind of argument did Moshe Rabbeinu advance about the poor wood chopper who was not wearing Tefillin and therefore forgot about the mitzvah of Shabbos? Furthermore, what was Hashem's response to Moshe? If the explicit warning did not stop him from sinning, how will wearing Tzitsis stop him from doing such sins in the future?

The answer is, yes. Such is the power of mitzvos. When someone warns a potential sinner that "If you do this you will be subject to the death penalty," he is appealing to the person's sense of logic. Sometimes, for whatever reason, logic does not sway people. However, a mitzvah has a power which is spiritual and mystical and metaphysical in nature. Such is the power of mitzvos to prevent a person from sinning.

This is akin to the famous Chazal on the pasuk concerning the reason for the loss of the Land of Israel "Me they abandoned and My Torah they did not observe." [Yirmiyahu 16:11] The Medrash in Eicha Rabba interprets the Almighty to be saying: "If only Me they would have abandoned, but kept yet my commandments then the Light of the commandments would have returned them to the proper path." There is an innate mystical power in mitzvos that has an effect on a people's souls to prevent them from committing sins and to put them on the correct path to further observance.

This was Moshe's "complaint" to the Almighty: The wood-chopper was not doing any mitzvos at that moment. He was not wearing Tefillin. Had he been wearing Tefillin, it would have been different. The Almighty told Moshe, "You are right! I need to give another mitzvah that is constant so that people should always be aware and have that mystical reminder / incentive to keep the rest of Torah as well."

This is reminiscent of a rather graphic Gemara in Tractate Menachos [44a]: "It was taught in a Baraisa: You never have a small mitzvah written in the Torah whose reward is not paid generously in this world; and in the world to come -- I do not even know how great it will be!"

Go out and learn from the mitzvah of Tzitsis. There was an incident with a certain man who was careful about the mitzvah of Tzitsis. He heard that there was a harlot in the cities by the sea that took four hundred golden dinars for her fee. He sent her the four hundred golden dinars and made an appointment.

When his time came he arrived and sat by the doorway. Her maidservant went in and told her "that man who sent you four hundred golden dinars has arrived and is sitting by the doorway. The harlot said, "Let him enter." He entered. She prepared seven beds for him, one above the other, six of silver and one of gold and between each pair of beds there was a silver ladder and the uppermost one was of gold.

She ascended and sat atop the uppermost bed unclothed. He too began to ascend in order to sit opposite her, unclothed. However, his four Tzitsis proceeded to pelt him upon his face. He slipped down the ladders and sat on the ground. And she too slipped down the ladders and sat on the ground.

She said to him, "By the Master of Rome I swear that I will not leave you until you tell me what flaw you saw in me." He replied "By the Divine Service, I swear that I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you. However, there is one mitzvah that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded us and Tzitsis is its name. Regarding this mitzvah, the phrase 'I am Hashem your G-d' is written twice in the Torah. One inform us 'I am He who will ultimately exact punishment from the corrupt,' and the other one inform us 'I am He who will ultimately give reward to the righteous'.

At this moment, these four fringes appeared to me like four witnesses (that would attest to the sin I was about to commit). She said to him, I will not leave you until you tell me your name, the name of your city, the name of your teacher, and the name of the Academy where you study Torah. He wrote this information and put it in her hand.

She arose and divided all her possessions. She gave one third to the government officials, one third to the poor, and one third she took in her hand. She divided all her property this way except for those linens, which she brought with her and she came to Rav Chiya's Beis Medrash. She said to him "Rabbi, give instructions on my behalf that they should make me a convert." He said to her, "My daughter, perhaps you have set your eyes upon one of the students?" She took out the written note from within her hand, gave it to him (and related the entire incident, persuading him that she was converting for the sake of Heaven -- Rashi). (After she converted) Rav Chiya told her, "Go and collect your acquisition" (i.e. -- marry the student you encountered in your home). Those linens that she had arranged for him illicitly, she now arranged for him permissively.

This is the reward for (observing the mitzvah of Tzitsis) in this world; and for its reward in the world to come, I do not even know how great it will be!

What is the point of this Gemara? The point of this Gemara is the power of mitzvos -- the fact that "their Light can return one to the proper path". Only one thing can stand in the way of a person's burning desire and that is the power of mitzvos, the power of Torah. *Transcribed by David Twersky; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman © 2013 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org*