

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

The figure of Korach as it emanates from this week's Torah reading is a most enigmatic one. The rabbis chose to characterize his rebellion against Moshe not so much in terms of evil as in terms of ultimate folly. Rashi quotes the famous statement that "Korach was such a wise and clever person; what on earth possessed him to engage in such a foolish venture?" Rashi states that since Korach saw that the great prophet Shmuel would be one of his future descendants, he wrongfully assumed that he, Korach, was the rightful leader of Israel now in the desert. Such flights of fancy and folly are common in human behavior. People often feel that they are somehow mistreated by life events or by others and therefore take these frustrations out on others.

Korach's disappointment at not being chosen for one of the high offices of the priesthood or the Levites turns into a personal vendetta against his own relative and mentor, Moshe. My long experience in the rabbinate has provided me many opportunities to see manifestations of such behavior. People's personal frustrations are somehow deflected towards leaders or institutions that are absolutely blameless but who are nevertheless handy targets to relieve someone's inner rage and conflict.

Moshe states it clearly: "I am not guilty of ever harming you; Aharon is certainly innocent regarding any of your complaints against him. Your complaint is against G-d, against life's problems and disappointments! Deal with yourself and don't vent your rage on others." And this inability to do so is truly the source of Korach's great folly.

The entire great Lithuanian Mussar movement founded by Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant was based on one overriding psychological principle - self-introspection. We always look outside of ourselves to deal with slights, real or imagined, and disappointments. Many times, if not most, the slight and disappointment is really from within our own actions, personalities, and deeds. Korach's problem is not Moshe or Aharon. Korach's problem is Korach.

There are commentaries that associate Korach's name with the Hebrew noun depicting baldness, emptiness. They comment, almost ruefully, that a hairpiece can certainly cover one's baldness and

appear to the outside that the person is not bald. But the truth is that the person remains bald. Korach is bald, empty of self-introspection, looking for self advancement and self importance from others because it apparently does not exist sufficiently within him.

When one needs validation and importance exclusively from outside sources then it inevitably leads to frustration, disputes and folly.

Korach therefore serves as an example of the self-destruction that people can cause to their own selves. Moshe appeals to Korach and his cohorts, who also suffer from the same inner emptiness of worth and spirit, to save themselves and their families by looking within themselves first. I think that is what is meant by his statement that "you are complaining against G-d, not against my brother and me." The G-dly soul that is within us must be regularly inspected and burnished by one's self. Then the outer world and its inevitable problems can be dealt with intelligently, wisely and, hopefully, in a successful manner. © 2007 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/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Korach took...” (Numbers 16:1) Who is Korach? Usually he is perceived as one of the arch-rebels of all times within the Jewish camp. From Exodus onward, no one's reputation is as sullied as Korach's - his sin so ignominious that the episode recording his death would be carved into the psyche of the nation forever, the bowels of the earth having swallowed him and his cohorts alive. But exactly how does this unique punishment fit his crime?

From the traditional perspective Korach is the perennial instigator and rabble-rouser, the self-possessed revolutionary. According to the commentaries, the very first word in our portion establishes his character: "Vayikach Korach...Now Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kohat, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab .... took." [Num. 38:1] The Torah doesn't spell out exactly what he 'took,' the object of the verb distinctly absent, which leads Rashi to quote the Midrash Tanchuma: ". 'And Korah took'-he took himself on one side with the

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE  
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intention of separating himself from the community so that he might raise a protest regarding the priesthood...." [38:1]

Of course, the Korach who inspires his self-serving mutinous rebellion couches his true purpose behind noble and inspiring language: "You take too much upon you, seeing that all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and G-d is among them; wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" [Numbers 16:3]

Here we have the classic argument of democracy: since we're all equal, we're all carved from the same flesh and blood, why should, you, Moses, lord it over us? Why should you be the holiest of all? Aren't we not all descended from the same grandfathers?! Did we not all together hear G-d's voice at Sinai?

Irregardless of how we want to understand the mutiny of Korach, the majority of commentators agree that the word, 'And he took,' is where the problem begins. Korach was a taker, either by "taking" in the sense of manipulating the peoples' hearts and minds, or taking himself out of the community, in the sense of arrogating for himself a position of power, while lambasting Moses as being a separatist and chauvinist.

To achieve his goal of power, he was willing to do anything, to make any claims, including posting a democratic ideal, in order to emerge a "leader" and denigrate the laws of Moses.

Our portion follows immediately the commandment to wear tzitzit, ritual fringes to be worn on four cornered garments, the conclusion of last week's portion [Num. 15:37-41] of Shlach. Rashi connects these two segments, tzitzit and Korach's rebellion, by quoting the Midrash: "Then they came and stood before Moses and said to him, 'Is a garment that is entirely blue subject to the law of tzitzit or is it exempt? He replied to them: It is subject to that law.' Whereupon they began to jeer at him: Is this possible? A robe of any different colored material requires only one thread of blue attached to it in order for it to be exempt from the law of ritual fringes. Does it not then follow logically that a garment which is entirely blue ought automatically be exempted from the law of tzitzit!?"(16:1)

Here we see how the plain meaning of the text is magnificently illuminated by the Midrash. Ostensibly,

Korach's argument appeals to the democratic spirit: I understand the necessity of a single blue fringe - Moses - bestowing his royal-blue kingship upon the entire nation of commoners (the white garment, the many regular white fringes, made from the white wool of white sheep); but if all the people are "blue-blooded royalty", if the entire nation stood at Sinai, heard the Divine charge, entered the Divine covenant, what is the necessity for a single blue fringe, a solitary regal Moses, to stand isolated, separate and above a wholly royal nation, an entire kingdom of priest-teachers?

Similar to this is the argument of the house filled with Bible Scrolls: I understand that a house devoid of any eternal verses of G-d's Word requires a mezuzah consisting of the Biblical portion of the Shema to make it worthy of habitation; but a house already completely filled with Biblical Scrolls, the House of Israel after the Revelation at Sinai in which every individual became filled to surfeit with G-d's words, certainly ought not require a separate G-d inspired individual like Moses, a distinct representative of one small portion of Biblical parchment, to establish its worthiness?!

What Korah failed to understand was that every individual did not reach the same spiritual level as every other individual at Sinai; much the opposite, each person understood from the Divine sound (Kol) only as much as his previous spiritual, intellectual and ethical development would allow him to understand. Indeed, it was only Moses, whose active intellect had already achieved the ability to "kiss" the Active Intellect of the Divine before Sinai, who truly evoked from the Divine Kol (sound) precisely that which G-d wished to communicate. (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed). Every Jew has the potential to be a leading member of the Kingdom of Priest-Teachers, to become a second Moses in his/her own right; whether or not he/she achieves such a royal status, depends upon the degree of hard work each individual expends in pursuit of spiritual excellence. The Bible does not tell us that every Jew is holy; it rather commands each Jew to become holy!

But Korah was not even himself serious about his argument. He was only using democracy to "take (or rather grab) what he thought was his rightful place of leadership given his ancestry (yichus). And G-d punishes this "taker" by having the earth swallow him up. After all, every human being was created from the dust of the earth, so only the earth has the inherent right to "take" each and every one of us! © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

### **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion*

**T**wo important groups within Korach's community have central claims, and they both have a common

basis. The Levites, whom we will call those who burn the incense, have a complaint about the status of Aharon. And Moshe replies to this, "Therefore, you and your community, are arguing against G-d. But what is Aharon, that you should complain about him?" [Bamidbar 16:11]. And when Datan and Aviram object to the Moshe's leadership, Moshe replies, "If these people die like all other people... G-d did not send me. But if G-d makes a novel creation... then you will know that these people angered G-d." [16:29-30].

But in spite of the similarities of the two claims, Moshe's reaction to them is completely different. With respect to the incense burners, Moshe reacts in a similar way to how he reacted to earlier complaints by Bnei Yisrael: "When Moshe heard, he fell on his face" [16:4]. Without first consulting with G-d, he proposes a test of offering pans of incense. On the other hand, Datan and Aviram make a direct claim against Moshe's leadership. "Is it not sufficient that you took us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you also take control over us? You did not in fact bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey to give us a heritage of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these people?" [16:13-14].

And this time Moshe reacts differently. "And Moshe became very angry, and he said to G-d: Do not accept their offering..." [16:15]. Why does Moshe react differently to the two complaints?

Evidently the different reaction corresponds to the differences between the complaints. The incense burners had a straightforward and clear complaint, objecting to the unique status of Aharon. Moshe falls on his face in a direct reaction to the complaint, but he does not have any problem responding to the details. He proposes a test of incense, with complete confidence in the results of the test, since he is sure that G-d will once again choose Aharon. However, the complaint by Datan and Aviram does not end with a question of whether Moshe was chosen by G-d. Moshe's reply is, "I have not taken one donkey of theirs, and I have not been bad towards any one of them" [16:15]. This implies that their complaint was more general, concerning corruption in the leadership. It did not refer only to the fact that Moshe was chosen but challenged his leadership in a broader sense. Moshe was sure that he was innocent and he was very upset about the libel against him, but how can a man be absolutely sure about himself, even one as great as Moshe? And in his distress, Moshe turns to G-d to help him prove his innocence.

In addition, the incense burners did not take any action before coming forward with their criticism. Datan and Aviram, on the other hand, evidently brought a Mincha sacrifice before they made their complaint. Moshe therefore explicitly requests, "Do not accept their offering." As Ibn Ezra notes, "Datan and Aviram were prominent men, and they brought a Mincha

sacrifice before their actions." Moshe therefore was hesitant about the outcome of their complaint, and he prayed to G-d.

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he 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. We have witnessed such attitudes in the past and unfortunately, even in these trying times, the rhetoric within the chambers of the Knesset can often be disrespectful and inappropriate. 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. ©2007 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 DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood.....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I

gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones."(57: 15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are no specific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will

come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI ZVI MILLER**

## The Salant Foundation

**W**hen the people of Israel were encamped at Mount Sinai, Moshe appointed the Priesthood to Aaron. Even though Korach was jealous of Aaron's status, he did not express his resentment at this time. He knew that Moshe, who had just succeeded to free the nation from slavery and give them the Torah, was in the heights of power and popularity. Therefore, anyone who spoke against Moshe would be quickly censured.

However, later-after the incident of "the spies"-the people changed their attitude towards Moshe. That is, they blamed Moshe for HaShem's decree that everyone over twenty-one would die in the desert. When Korach sensed the people's change of heart toward Moshe, he exploited the situation- and publicly challenged Moshe's authority.

The sudden attitude reversal of the people is like the case of a sick person who received a prescription from a master doctor. However, the patient ignored the doctor's orders. Ultimately, he died and his foolish family held the doctor responsible.

So too, Moshe taught his people the path of life. They deviated from the path and found sore trouble. When death came upon them, they foolishly blamed Moshe, the father of our prophets. Unable to face their own inadequacies, they lashed out at others. Yet, Moshe was completely blameless. Moreover, if not

for the prayer of Moshe, they would have suffered complete annihilation for their utter breach of faith.

We see from this episode that blaming others for one's own mistakes is one of the strongest-and most common-pitfalls of human nature. The generation that left Egypt is called the "Generation of Wisdom," because HaShem revealed Himself to them. Nevertheless, when they erred in their ways, even these people of stature did not take responsibility for their culpability. Rather they blamed Moshe because they refused to admit their own flaws.

Admitting that one is wrong is one of the most difficult challenges in life. However, the virtue of admitting a mistake is like a painful labor. That is, it gives birth to humility-the most precious of all character traits. May we have the moral courage to admit our mistakes and misdeeds. In turn, we will be blessed with peace, forgiveness, and many good friends. [Based on Da'as Torah of Rav Yerucham HaLevi and the Ramban]

Today: Ask forgiveness when you recognize that you acted inappropriately. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & aish.org

**RABBI BARUCH LEFF**

## Kol Yaakov

**W**e know that sometimes people ignore the message and kill the messenger. Judaism actually teaches that we must ignore the messenger and apply (or sometimes kill) the message. Our Parsha, Korach, discusses this concept.

Korach engineered a rebellion against Moshe's authority and leadership. Included in the rebellious group were Dasan and Aviram. Moshe summoned them to appear before him to discuss their complaints but they flatly refused. They railed at Moshe saying:

"Isn't it enough that you took us out of a land of milk and honey (Egypt) to cause us to die in the desert? Now, you want to lord over us? You have not brought us to the land of flowing milk and honey (Israel), nor did you give us a field and vineyard! Even if you would threaten to send someone to gouge out our eyes, we will not go up (to you)!" (BaMidbar 16:13-14).

Talk about Jewish chutzpah! Dasan and Aviram lace into Moshe, cynically calling Egypt and not Israel, 'the land of milk and honey.' Then they brazenly blame Moshe for the sin of the spies and his 'failure' to lead the Jewish People to conquer the land of Israel, not to mention their accusation of Moshe 'lording' over them for his own honor. This was surely a devastating, albeit untrue, critique of Moshe.

How does Moshe react? Seemingly, like any one of us. "Moshe became infuriated" (BaMidbar 16:15). But Rashi steps in to show us how radically different and how amazingly beautiful Moshe's response actually was. "He was pained greatly." (Rashi, Bamidbar 16:15). Rashi seems to be saying

that Moshe was not angry; rather he was upset and saddened.

But what would be wrong if Moshe was angry? While it is true that Moshe is called the most humble of men (BaMidbar 12:3), humility does not mean that you should be meek, especially when faced with such rebellion and brazenness. What is Rashi trying to convey?

The solution is this. There is a world of difference between those who hate and kill and those who kill out of necessity. The difference lies in whether when we see evil perpetrated by criminals and oppressors, we react by hating the perpetrators or hating the evils committed. Do we hate the person, or the action? If we hate the person, then our response will be based primarily on personal revenge whereas if we detest only the evil action, we will react with a strong desire to root out only the evil deeds.

There may not be a physical or active difference between these two approaches on the ground. In both cases, great battles will need to be waged to fight the evil and sometimes wars and killings will be involved. But this differentiation of intent when fighting evil is immense.

We must feel pained and distressed in our rooting out of evil and our punishing of perpetrators. We must not let our personal feelings of anger and fury dominate us. If we don't accomplish this, we risk killing and punishing for all the wrong reasons. We risk losing control of ourselves and fighting in ways that are completely personal and not for G-d and truth's sake at all. One of the tremendous lessons that we have learned about the nation of Israel throughout the terrible crisis and war that we have experienced since September 2000 is how deeply humane we are. Even in enduring deaths of over 500 and thousands of injuries (many serious) to Palestinian terrorism, we have remained humane on the battlefields and in our society.

Far from the incitement, demonization, hatred, and glorification of the killings of innocent civilians that plagues Palestinian society, Israel has never taken pride or satisfaction in fighting or killing its enemies. Israel's wars and violent struggles are always fought with goals of preventing future terror attacks and saving lives. In fact, in an amazing show of Israeli society's intolerance toward hatred for hatred's sake, The Jerusalem Post, May. 27, 2002, reported:

"Five Israeli soldiers have been sent to prison for looting and vandalizing Palestinian property during a six-week Israeli offensive in the West Bank. The soldiers, who were sentenced to up to five months in a military jail, were also dropped to the rank of private, the army said in a statement. Another 20 soldiers are being investigated on similar charges, the army said, adding that some of them are also suspected of violent acts. A platoon commander is being investigated on

charges he abused a Palestinian while searching his home, the army said."

Can we ever imagine similar investigations taking place in the courtrooms of our enemies? Yes, we must indeed wish for evil to cease, but not the evildoers. This often entails destroying and killing the evildoers but we mustn't kill with glee; only with a heavy heart. The Talmud in Brachot 10a expresses this idea and states: "The verse in Psalms (104:35) says that 'sins should perish,' not sinners. We must pray for the sinners to repent where possible, not for their death and demise."

Returning to Parshat Korach, Moshe is not angry with Korach, Dasan, Aviram, or any of the rebels. His feelings are not personal. Moshe is distressed, saddened, and depressed that these people have steeped themselves into the depths of sin. As Rashi explains, Moshe is not infuriated (as the verse implies on first glance). He is upset and disturbed at the face of evil, but not at the evildoers.

This approach helps explain an event at the end of the Parsha as well. After Korach and his followers have been killed by G-d's plagues and punishments, the people shockingly complain to Moshe and Aharon saying, "You have killed the people of G-d!" First, G-d sends more plagues that destroy many of the complainers, but then He commands Aharon to take a staff, along with the princes of each of the 12 tribes, and place them in the holy tent of the Tabernacle. "It shall be that the man whom I choose, his staff will blossom, and I will remove the complaints of the Jewish people!" (Bamidbar 17:20, translated loosely). Aharon's staff blossoms with buds and almonds the next morning and the complainers are silenced and placated.

What was the complaint of the Jews against Moshe and Aharon? Didn't they understand the seriousness of Korach and his followers' crimes of rebellion? And however we answer that question, how did Aharon's almond blooming blossoms pacify them?

The Jewish people were lamenting the loss of so many of their brethren and their leaders to Korach's folly and they blamed these horrible events on Moshe and Aharon. They surely knew that Korach's revolt had to be put down strongly but they questioned the methodology. They wondered out loud why Moshe and Aharon didn't pray for Korach and his followers to repent (as cited earlier from Brachot 10a). Was Korach's evil so great that repentance could not have helped? And since Moshe and Aharon did not pray for Korach, doesn't that suggest that they simply wanted Korach dead and 'out of the way' for their selfish and personal interests?

The beauty of the almond blossoms symbolized that Moshe and Aharon acted beautifully, peacefully and lovingly. If indeed Korach had the potential for repentance and change, then Moshe and Aharon would most certainly have prayed for it. But

such was not the case. Korach had to be killed because that was the only course of action possible to eliminate his evil. When we criticize, is our goal to 'pay back' the perpetrator with rage or to change his ways with love? We must apply the lessons of Moshe in his very difficult saga with Korach. We must learn to act forcefully when necessary, but always with love in our hearts, not hatred. We must hate actions, not people. At times, we may be forced to kill, but let us do it with love. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**hen did Korach's rebellion happen? There are three approaches discussed by the commentators, including the reasons supporting each of them.

The Ibn Ezra says that it happened while they were still at Sinai, right after Aharon became the Kohain Gadol and the Levi'im replaced the first-born. Since this was the crux of the rebellion, it follows that it took place right away, and any suggestion that it occurred afterwards must include a reason why Korach didn't complain earlier. (The Ramban, who says that the rebellion happened after the spies, explains that until things started to go downhill, which culminated with the decree that the generation would die out, Korach knew that no one would follow him.)

The Shaaray Aharon adds that Korach's rebellion follows the "mekoshaish," who violated the second Shabbos (see Rashi on Bamidbar 15:32), putting two incidents that occurred at Sinai together. However, the commandment to wear tzitzis comes between them and can be their connection, as it was a response to Moshe's argument following the Shabbos violation that a constant reminder to keep the commandments was necessary even on Shabbos (when Tefilin aren't worn, see Eliyahu Rabbah 24) and Korach used tzitzis in his opening salvo against Moshe (see Tanchuma 2). If anything, it could be argued that the Torah relates the Korach story where it happened (after the spies) and the "mekoshaish" was moved here because of the tzitzis connection. Either way the Ibn Ezra would need to explain why Korach is taught here rather than earlier, when it actually happened.

When Moshe rebuked the nation before his death, he started by hinting at their missteps, including mentioning "Chatzeiros" (Devarim 1:1). Rashi tells us that this refers to the "division [caused] by Korach." Chatzeiros was where Miriam was punished for speaking about Moshe and the nation had to wait seven days for her before traveling further (Bamidbar 12:15). However, those seven days were the only days the nation spent at Chatzeiros. We know this from two standpoints. First of all, they left as soon as Miriam became "tavor," and she must have confronted Moshe (and been punished) as soon as they arrived from

Kivros Hataiva, where the 70 elders were appointed, which had led to Miriam's learning of her brother's separation from his wife (see Rashi on 12:1). In addition, the Talmud (Taanis 29a) tells us that the spies returned on Tisha b'Av. Being that the nation first left Sinai on the 20th of Iyar (Bamidbar 10:11-12), traveled for three days (10:33), spent a minimum of a month at Kivros Hataiva (11:20), and the spies were away for 40 days (13:25), the maximum amount of days they could possibly have been at Chatzeiros is seven. Therefore, if Korach's rebellion happened at Chatzeiros, it must have occurred within these seven days, i.e. after Miriam was punished and before the spies were sent.

This comment of Rashi, with its implication that Korach's rebellion was in Chatzeiros and before the spies were sent, is the topic of much discussion, especially in light of the fact that Rashi tells us explicitly, in more than one place, that Korach's rebellion happened after the incident with the spies. In explaining why Moshe fainted upon hearing of the rebellion, Rashi explains (16:4) that he was afraid that his prayers would no longer help, since this was the fourth incident that required his intervention. Being that the third incident is the spies, obviously Korach occurred afterwards. In explaining Dasan and Avirum's response to Moshe that he hasn't brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey (16:14), Rashi tells us that they are referring to the decree that the entire generation would perish in the desert (14:29), which was a result of the spies.

There are basically two approaches to resolving this apparent contradiction in Rashi (whether Korach occurred before or after the spies); the Mizrahi (and others) maintain that both opinions are found in the Midrashim, and it is not uncommon for Rashi to choose both sides, using each to explain the most straightforward meaning of the verse. Therefore, in Devarim, where the only sin that occurred at Chatzeiros was Miriam's (and Moshe would not rebuke the entire nation for her sin), Rashi relies on the opinion that Korach rebelled in Chatzeiros to explain the verse. (This opinion is given by Midrash Lekach Tov and is also stated by Rabbi Yehudah the son of Ilai in the Margolios edition of Devarim Rabbah 1:9.) Because Dasan and Avirum's response seems to be saying that they will never get to the Promised Land, Rashi follows the opinion that the spies happened first when explaining this verse (Seder Olam Rabbah (8) uses this verse to prove that Korach happened after the spies). Those who say that Korach happened first will need to explain what Dasan and Avirum's response was (since they still thought they were on their way to the Promised Land) while those who say the spies happened first will need a different explanation for what rebuke is implied in "Chatzeiros" (Rashi provides one in his 2nd explanation there).

Others (including the Nachalas Yaakov) are hesitant to allow Rashi the luxury of using conflicting Midrashim when it is convenient, and there are about half a dozen different explanations given by various commentators to try understand how Rashi can say that "Chatzeiros" refers to Korach if the rebellion happened afterwards, in Paran/Kadesh (the Maharal suggests that Moshe used Chatzeiros because it is in the vicinity, and "Paran" was already used to rebuke them regarding the spies).

So far we have three different opinions: at Sinai, at Chatzeiros and at Kadesh. There is a fourth opinion, given in Batei Midrashos II 54:4, which seems to say that Korach didn't rebel until the 40th year (or perhaps that it was brewing until the 40th year), as it says that "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and their tents in the Plains of Yericho by the Wadi of Shittim" If the rebellion didn't start until they had already conquered Sichon and Og, we would need to explain why the Torah taught it here, rather than after everything else from the first two years was finished (in Parashas Chukas). The tzitzis connection is a possibility, although now both ends would be out of place (except according to Tosfos on Baba Basra 119b, who say that the Mekoshaish happened after the spies, as Tzela'chad's intent was to prove that they must still keep the commandments even though they weren't getting to the Promised Land).

Where the rebellion occurred impacts several other areas as well. I will present some of them here, but would love to hear of any others ([dkramer@compuserve.com](mailto:dkramer@compuserve.com)).

(1) The juxtaposition of Miriam's skin condition and the spies. This is one of the flashpoints in the discussion of whether Rashi utilizes conflicting Midrashim, as if Korach happened first there is a much greater need to explain why the Torah changed the order and discussed the spies first. It is also a little awkward for Korach to have attacked Moshe's authority right after it has been established (as everyone knew why Miriam was punished and they had to wait, and the spies were expected to learn a *loshon hara* lesson from her) that Moshe's level of prophecy is so much greater than every other prophet. Perhaps Korach got even more jealous after seeing how much greater Moshe was. On the other hand, the spies really should have learned their lesson about being careful with what they say, seeing how Miriam's constructive criticism led to Korach's outright rebellion. Because the nation was supposed to leave Chatzeiros right away, but had to wait a week for Miriam, the "downtime" may have contributed to Korach being able to organize the rebellion as well.

(2) Dasan and Avirum's response to Moshe. At face value, it certainly seems that they were saying that they weren't ever going to reach the Promised Land.

However, they had been questioning Moshe's authority since Egypt, so this could be their way of saying they didn't believe Moshe's promise to bring them there even if there was no decree yet that their generation would die out. If the rebellion happened in the 40th year, after 39 years of wandering in the desert, this disbelief is more understandable. The Maharai says that their argument was not that they will never get there, but that the Kohanim were already getting their benefits, the "matanos kehuna" (priestly gifts), even though no one else were getting theirs (as they had no land yet), even though it was presented as if the former was necessary because the Kohanim weren't getting a share of the land (see also Bechor Shor). The Pa'aneyach Raza says that they knew (from Eldad and Maydad's prophecy) that Moshe wouldn't lead them into the land, so weren't saying that they wouldn't get there, but questioning Moshe's leadership since he won't get there.

(3) After the spies issued their bad report, an attempt was made to "appoint leaders and return to Egypt" (Bamidbar 14:4). Midrash Tanchuma (Shemos 10) says that Dasan and Avirum were the ones who said these words, while Midrash Tehillim (106:5) says that Dasan was appointed leader instead of Moshe. Obviously, if Korach happened first, Dasan and Avirum were no longer around to either appoint or be appointed.

(4) One of the explanations given for Moshe "falling on his face" (Bamidbar 16:4) is that he was accused of being with married women (Sanhedrin 110a). Much has been written trying to explain this outlandish accusation (see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5764/korach.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5764/korach.pdf)), with one of the suggestions given to make it slightly less outlandish being that whenever a husband would complain about Moshe the wife would defend him, starting from the time that the women refused to give their gold for the golden calf. If Korach happened after the spies, the women could not have been part of the mob demanding that scouts be sent into Canaan (see Rashi on Devarim 1:22), or this suggestion would be greatly weakened.

(5) Rabbeinu Bachya says that the 12 Nesi'im that brought gifts when the Mishkan was consecrated were among the 250 leaders that joined Korach and died. If the rebellion occurred before the spies were sent, we can better understand why new tribal leaders needed to be chosen for the mission.

Although over 3,000 years later, with several traditions being transmitted, we can't know for sure when the rebellion took place, the majority opinion is that it occurred soon after the incident with the spies. Nevertheless, as with many other things, the nuances of the different opinions make for a fun ride. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer