

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG**

### Between the Lines

**T**his week's parsha tells the story of a man named Korach who led a mutinous rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Korach claimed that the entire Jewish people was holy, and therefore it was inappropriate for Moses and Aaron to exalt themselves over the people (Numbers 16:3). Moses responds to Korach, "In the morning, G-d will make known who is His own and who is the holy one, and He will draw him close to Him" (Numbers 16:5).

It seems strange that Moses would want to wait until the morning to resolve such a critical issue. Why not settle the matter immediately?

Furthermore, Rashi (based on Midrash Tanchuma 7) teaches that Korach spent the entire night going around to each tribe and trying to gain support for his rebellion. Why does the Midrash stress that Korach went around at night?

According to the Netivot Shalom, certain actions that are not explicitly condemned in the Torah are nevertheless considered more severe than sins that are explicitly mentioned. Korach, by arguing against his rabbi, provides one example of this principle. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) teaches that one who disagrees with, argues with, complains against, or suspects his rabbi is considered to be exhibiting all these behaviors toward G-d Himself.

In order to understand how the Talmud can equate a rabbi with the Divine- a comparison that seems to border on idolatry! -- we must examine another Talmudic passage (Ketubot 111b). Several verses in the Torah (Deut. 4:4, Deut. 30:20) instruct us to cleave to G-d. The Talmud wonders how this is possible, since G-d is described as an all-consuming fire (Deut. 4:24). How can we be expected to attach ourselves to a blaze of perfect holiness?

The Talmud answers by explaining that anyone who marries his daughter to a Sage, does business with a Sage, or uses his property to give pleasure to a Sage (for example, providing him with a meal) is considered as if he attached himself to the Divine Presence.

According to the Netivot Shalom, the purpose of the Torah and all its mitzvot is to enable us to cleave to G-d (d'veikut). One mitzvah in particular, however,

helps us achieve this goal more than all the others: cleaving to Torah scholars. When the Talmud compares a rabbi to G-d, it does not mean that the rabbi is G-d, G-d forbid. Rather, our connection and attachment to a rabbi brings us to a deeper connection to G-d. From observing how our Sages behave, even in the most mundane areas (eating, speaking, walking, conducting business), we learn how to become G-d-like in every facet of life. In this way, we become closer to G-d.

Based on this idea, we can see the severity of Korach's error. When Korach stated, "The entire congregation is holy," (Numbers 16:3), he was implying that the Jewish people no longer needed to have a rabbi. It seems that Korach wanted to prevent the Jewish people from cleaving to Torah scholars, thereby preventing them from cleaving to G-d. According to this understanding, Korach was rebelling not only against Moses and Aaron, but against the very purpose of Torah and mitzvot.

We could suggest that the letters of Korach's name provide a hint to this idea, since they form the acronym of the phrase Chalak Kedushat Rabo ("He argued on the sanctity of his rabbi").

This helps us understand why Moses waited until the morning to resolve the dispute with Korach, whereas Korach acted at night. The Midrash (Shmot Raba 15) teaches that the Jewish people are compared to the moon. We can understand this statement based on the Talmud's (Chullin 60b) explanation of an apparent contradiction in the Torah, which states, "G-d made the two great luminaries, the great luminary to serve by day and the small luminary to serve by night" (Genesis 1:16). How can two "great" luminaries be different sizes?

The Talmud explains that originally the sun and the moon were both the same size. However, the moon complained to G-d, "Can two kings share the same crown?" G-d acknowledged the moon's objection, saying "Go and diminish yourself."

Maimonides (Laws of Kiddush HaChodesh) states that the moon does not generate its own light, but is rather a reflection of the sun's light. According to the Toldot Yaakov Yosef, the moon initially complained to G-d because it thought it did generate its own light. G-d's response ("Go and diminish yourself") was intended to teach the moon the true nature of its illumination. It is as if He told the moon, "You think you

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provide your own light because you are so close to the sun. Once you create some distance ("go"), you will see on your own ("yourself") that you are small."

[This is not the straightforward understanding of the Talmud, in which G-d literally made the moon smaller. According to this new approach, the first half of the verse, which refers to the two great luminaries, describes how the luminaries appeared. The second half of the verse clarifies what was actually there. G-d never created two equal "kings" in the first place.]

Now we can see why the Jewish people are compared to the moon. The moon does not generate its own light and needs the light of the sun in order to shine. The masses of the Jewish people also do not start out with their own light; we need a rabbi, who is compared to the sun, to give us light and help us shine. A rabbi has his own light because he has already achieved d'veikut with G-d, whereas the majority of us are still working toward that goal.

The Tifferet Shmuel (vol. 2) points out that the moon's mistake occurred at night. When the moon was directly opposite the sun, shining brightly, it assumed it generated its own light. In the daytime, however, when there is a greater distance between the sun and the moon, it became obvious that the moon never generated its own light at all.

This is why the Midrash stresses that Korach tried to gain support for his rebellion at night. Korach lived in darkness. Although he was a Torah scholar, he got so close to Moses, his rabbi, that he began to think he had his own light. Therefore, he tried to gain followers at night, because he shone most brightly at that time. Moses, on the other hand, knew the true source of Korach's light. This is why he waited until the morning to resolve the issue. In the daytime, it would be obvious that Korach was merely a reflection of Moses's light. Perhaps he would realize on his own that he still needed a rabbi.

We could suggest that the remedy for Korach's error can also be found in the letters of his name. The letters of korach can be rearranged to spell the word rachok ("distant"). In the daytime, when the sun and the moon are farther apart, Korach could see with clarity what was not evident at night. The letters of korach also spell the word kerach ("ice"). With the clarity of distance, Korach could have seen that he was as cold

as ice without Moses, and that he did not have his own fire at all.

May we all be blessed to find and follow a real rabbi who speaks to us and whose light will cause us to shine. In this way, may we grow ever closer to G-d, becoming more and more G-d-like, so that we may be elevated to the highest levels. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd they rose up in the face of Moses" [Num. 16:2] When is dissension and argument positive, healthy debate and an outgrowth of "these and those are the word of the Living G-d [B.T. Eruvin 13]", and when is dispute negative, a venomous cancer which can destroy the very underpinning of our nation? Apparently Korach's rebellious dissent is negative, as the Talmud maintains: "Rav said: He who is unyielding in maintaining a dispute violates a negative command, as it is written, 'And let him not be as Korach, and his company.'" [B.T. Sanhedrin 110a] But can we glean from this statement operative guidelines as to when it is right and when it is wrong to argue.

We all know the story of Korach, the subject of this week's Torah portion; this rebel against Mosaic authority and Aaronic Priesthood influenced 250 leading Israelite personages to stand up against the established - and Divinely ordained - leadership.

After a contest between the upstarts and Moses involving the offering of fire-pans of incense to determine the chosen of G-d which concludes with Korach and his cohorts being consumed by a Divine fire, G-d commands that the 250 pans of the rebels be pounded into plates to cover the altar: "To be a memorial to the children of Israel, that no stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before G-d; do not be as Korach, and his company, as G-d said by the hand of Moses, concerning him." [Num.17:5]

Rav's prooftext regarding an unyielding disputant comes from this verse; the Bible is therefore saying, according to Rav's interpretation, that no one should ever again maintain a dispute, as G-d said concerning him, that is, concerning Korah. This view would maintain that the problem of Korah was that he would not give in and continued the argument; one may raise a dissenting opinion, but when the accepted leader rejects it, the dissenter must back down.

Rashi suggests a different understanding. He takes the pronoun "him" to refer to Aaron; the problem with Korah's argument was that he was challenging G-d's chosen Kohanim - descendants of Aaron - as the only legitimate priests. Such a challenge can never be allowed in the future, "as G-d said concerning him," that is concerning Aaron. Rav Isaac Bernstein, z"l, of

London, in a masterful lecture, cited the Hatam Sofer, who claims that it is the attitude of the dissenter - and not the subject of his dissent - which makes the difference. This Sage bemoans the fact that all too often, when two people argue, one (or both) of the parties involved will claim that only he has a direct pipeline to G-d; consequently only he has the only right opinion, and the other view must be totally delegitimized. These individuals claim that they are arguing "for the sake of heaven, in the name of G-d and Torah."

Supporting his view, the Hatam Sofer reads the verse, "don't be like Korach and his company, [who argued that] G-d spoke by the hand of Moses [only] to him;" to Korah; it is forbidden for any individual to maintain that G-d speaks only to him, that only he knows the truth, and that there is no possibility of truth to his opponent. Hence an illegitimate and therefore improper debate is one which seeks to delegitimize the other side, declaring that only one side has the whole truth!

The Hatam Sofer proves his point from the case of R. Eliezer in the Talmud-who actually did have a pipeline to G-d [B.T. Bava Metzia 59b]-- but was nevertheless bested in debate by the Sages - because, in the final analysis, halakha is determined by the logic of the majority of the Sages, and not by voices from heaven. The Talmud records how R. Eliezer disagreed with his contemporaries on the status of a particular oven. He was absolutely convinced that he was right, and to prove his claim, he asked and received a series of signs from heaven demonstrating the accuracy of his halakhic opinion.

Nevertheless, since his was a minority view in the face of a majority ruling, his refusal to relent led to his excommunication. The case of R. Eliezer is brought to teach that even if you are certain that G-d is on your side, you dare not read the other view out of the realm of legitimacy.

Rabbi Bernstein further directs us to another fascinating source. We have a mishnah in Tractate Sukkah with the following law: "If a man's head and the greater part of his body were within the sukkah and his table of food and within the house, (this outside of the Sukkah) Bet Shammai declared such a meal on Sukkot to be invalid and Bet Hillel declared it valid... Bet Hillel says to Bet Shammai: 'Was there not an incident wherein the elders of Bet Shammai and elders of Bet Hillel went to visit R. Yochanan the son of the Hurani, and they found him sitting with his head and the greater part of his body in a sukkah, and the table of food inside the house, and they did not make any comment about it. Did this not imply that the Academy of Shammai had acquiesced in this case to the Academy of Hillel!' Bet Shammai said to them: 'Here [specifically] is the proof [to our position].' In actuality the elders of Bet Shammai did say to R. Yochanan 'If it is in such a

way that you always perform [the mitzvah of Sukkah], then you never [successfully] performed the commandment in your life-time' [Mishnah Sukkah 2:7]." And so Bet Shammai never gave in to Bet Hillel!

How are we to understand the mishnah?

This issue is addressed in the work of R. Naftali of Vermaiser, "Maleh Ratzon", in which he explained the mishnah as follows: the elders of Bet Shammai and the elders of Bet Hillel had indeed been present together at the sukkah of R. Yochanan, and they all saw that their host conducted himself in accordance with the law of Bet Hillel. Bet Shammai, although of a different opinion than Bet Hillel, said nothing - because of their respect for Bet Hillel and because they understood the validity of a dissenting opinion different from their own. Only after the elders of Bet Hillel left the sukkah did the elders of Bet Shammai clarify their alternative position by presenting another viewpoint. This sensitivity displayed by the representatives of the two major and opposing Academies in Mishnaic times emphasizes the fundamental pluralism in the Talmud: two views may be at loggerheads, but all must respect and learn from - rather than revile and de-legitimize - our opponents. And two opposing sides in a debate can and must respect and socialize with each other, even to the extent of marrying into each others families!

As we now approach the 21st century, can we say that we have adequately absorbed the lessons of the dangers of dispute and dissension? Has Korach and Korachism truly been consumed by fire, never to be heard from again? Would that it were so! © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI BORUCH 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 'sinners 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.

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**P**icture this scene: After a lecture on being careful about keeping kosher, a prestigious member of the synagogue approaches the rabbi while munching on a candy bar. Between bites (and commenting how delicious it is), he asks the rabbi whether or not the candy bar is kosher. Obviously, the question should have been asked before starting to eat it. Yet, after hearing Moshe teach about the requirement to put fringes on a four-cornered garment, with one of the fringes on each corner being dyed blue in a specific manner ("techayles"), Korach approaches Moshe wearing a talis (with four corners) made completely of techayles and asks him whether or not it needs to have fringes on its corners. And it wasn't just Korach that did this. Rashi (Bamidbar 16:1, based on numerous Midrashim), tells us that Korach had 250 of the most prestigious members of the nation wear four-cornered garments made entirely from techayles when they asked whether or not they needed fringes. How could they have asked this question while wearing them? Weren't they afraid of violating a biblical commandment if the answer was that it needed them?

One thought that may come to mind is that the question itself was part of their rebellion against Moshe. Or, as the Maharal explains it, they were convinced that such a garment didn't need fringes, and wanted to use that "fact" as part of their argument that the nation doesn't need a "leader" (just as the all-blue garment didn't, in their minds, need a blue thread). However, the

Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 10:1) says that it was only after Moshe told them that even this garment needs blue fringes that Korach started denying the Torah's divine origin. Similarly, the Moshav Zekaynim says that it was after hearing this and that a house full of Holy Scriptures still needs a mezuzah (which has just the first paragraph of the Shema) that Korach started making fun of Moshe and claiming that he was making this stuff up. If it was the answer that started the rebellion, how could Korach and his group have asked whether such a talis needed fringes while already wearing them? Shouldn't they have asked the question before putting them on? And why did all 251 of them have to wear such talaisim? The fact that they took the trouble of making 251 of these garments seems rather odd as well.

Another possible explanation could be based on the Mizrachi, who insists that the question was not about needing fringes, but whether besides white fringes they needed blue fringes as well. If these talaisim had fringes, then the biblical commandment would not have been violated. Nevertheless, the wording of Rashi (and his sources) indicates that the question was whether or not they needed fringes, not whether or not they needed blue threads. This is spelled out more clearly in the Yerushalmi, where the verse quoted by Moshe in his response (Devarim 22:12) doesn't even mention techayles, only that fringes are required on the corners of your garment. Obviously, the question must have been about fringes, not blue threads.

Although Korach was a prominent person, including being one of the Levi'im that carried the Holy Ark when the nation traveled (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3), he felt slighted when his cousin Elitzafan ben Uziel was chosen as the leader of the family of Kehas (see Rashi). He wasn't going to rebel based on this, especially after seeing all that G-d had done through Moshe. But he craved leadership nonetheless.

Korach was also fabulously wealthy (see Sanhedrin 110a), and was therefore able to start his own "movement" of which he could be the leader (his own shteibel, if you will). He spared no expense in making sure that all of the material needs of his followers were met (see Sanhedrin 52a). Not just the basics, which G-d was already providing, but lavish meals and other creature comforts, ostensibly with the intent of allowing for an even greater religious experience. With the body fully taken care of, they felt that they could focus on the soul, and soar to the highest heights. They didn't just keep the law, they went beyond the law, trying to reach the deepest of the deep and become the holiest of the holy. Moshe said they had to put a thread of techayles on each corner of their garment in order to remind them of G-d's throne; they went further and Korach had a talis of techayles made for each of them. Now they would really be able

to focus on G-d! Moshe said that every house needs to have a mezuzah with the Shema; they made sure that every paragraph that had ever been taught was in their home. They were an extraordinary group, consisting of the heads of the Sanhedrin, the tribal leaders, and the intellectual elite. And Korach was their leader.

But then they went too far. Instead of just going beyond the law, they started thinking they were above it. They said that the mezuzah was required because not every home had Holy Scriptures within it; since they did, theirs didn't need one. People wore all kinds of garments, and needed the blue threads to constantly remind them of G-d; they wore garments that were completely blue, so thought they didn't need to attach any blue threads. The matenos kehuna (required "gifts" given to the Kohain, such as the cheeks of an animal after it was slaughtered) were instituted so that the average, ordinary Jew would have some contact with a Kohain who would make sure that he is keeping the Torah properly (the Ralbag says that one of the main purposes of the Temple service was to allow the people to spend time with the Kohanim, who would, as part of their priestly role, try to teach them how to best get close to G-d); they felt that they were beyond that, so didn't need to have a regular spiritual checkup. They understood why G-d would institute these laws for the common person, who needed the structure of the law in order to attain at least a little spiritual fire. But for this special group, they thought it was unnecessary and not demanded of them by G-d. But then something happened that shattered their world.

After telling us that Korach made 250 all-blue talaisim for his "congregation," the Midrash (e.g. Bamidbar Rabbah and Tanchuma) says that he "made a party for them, and they wrapped themselves in their blue talaisim," indicating that they wore them even before their confrontation with Moshe. "The sons of Aharon came to take their gifts, the chest and right thigh, [and] they (Korach's group) stood against them and said to them, 'who commanded you to take these?' They said, 'Moshe.'" They answered and said, 'nothing was given to you, for G-d has not commanded it.' They (the Kohanim) came and informed Moshe [who] went to try to appease [Korach's group]. They immediately stood against him, as it says, 'and they stood against Moshe' (Bamidbar 16:2). It was then that they were told that every talis, blue or not, needs blue fringes; that every house, even if filled with scriptures, needs a mezuzah; and that everyone, no matter how holy, must give matenos kehuna.

Moshe insisted that the structure was demanded by G-d, which they couldn't accept. They held themselves above that; even the rest of the nation saw them as "G-d's special group" (see 17:6). If Moshe was wrong about it applying to them, maybe he was wrong about it applying to everyone else as well. After all, the entire nation had heard G-d's words at Sinai

(see Rashi on 16:3), and Moshe had no right to construct laws on his own. They instigated a full rebellion, which led to G-d proving that the structure was not Moshe's invention, but His will, and no matter how spiritual one thinks he is, it must be adhered to.

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**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he 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. © 2008 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 ADAM LIEBERMAN

## A Life Lesson

In this week's Torah portion, a group of Jews, led by a man named Korach, rebelled against Moses. Like Moses, they also wanted to be leaders of the Jewish people. But instead of stating this as their real desire, Korach positioned his argument against Moses himself and his inabilities by declaring to Moses that: "...It is too much for you!" (Numbers 16:3)

Instead of being genuine in his desire to be on the same level of leadership as Moses, Korach first shifted his entire angle. He began his claim against Moses by making the point that the job Moses had of leading all Jewish people was simply far too much of a task for him to take on by himself. Therefore, Korach reasoned, other Jews should also hold prominent leadership postings.

One of the problems with his argument is that it wasn't at all how he felt. Korach was simply jealous of Moses and the claim that it was too much for him was of no concern to Korach at all.

In our own lives, many times we unfortunately act the same way Korach did. We will disguise our real reason for wanting something. Instead of taking ownership of why we want something, we choose to make it about someone or something else. The reason we do this is because we feel insecure and lack the self-confidence to be totally honest, and therefore we don't have the courage to say what we're really thinking. Besides being disingenuous, the problem with this approach is that it will stifle you from growing and becoming great.

With Korach, not only was his strategy wrong, his entire motivation was based on a desire to destroy Moses. Let's focus for a moment on our own need to 'say it straight.'

For example, assume you want to be promoted at work. The right thing to do is to go to your boss and

state the reasons why you-on your own merit- feel that you should be promoted. Unfortunately, what people often do instead is march into their boss's office and immediately start stating all the problems that exist. They might say, "I feel my division is in real trouble and those in charge, while very nice people, just aren't doing a very good job. And as we experience more growth in the company, it will certainly be too much for them. Therefore, I should take their place." (At this point, many people also throw in "I spoke to many people in my department and they all agree with me and they would love for me to become their new boss.")

It's certainly much easier to highlight a problem that others are doing and become the savior to all concerned. But again, you can never grow as a person if you don't stand up for what you believe in without knocking others in the process. Anyone can point out faults. But true leadership means looking solely at your abilities and why you have what it takes to make a difference.

The next time you want to make any sort of change, take full ownership of what you want to do and the real reason why you want it. You might not succeed in your request, but one thing is for certain. And that is when you have an authentic and honest approach change is guaranteed to take place- because as a person, you will grow by leaps and bounds. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.com

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

Even though Korach and his community were punished and died, Bnei Yisrael sharply criticized Moshe and Aharon: "And all of the community of Bnei Yisrael complained the next day about Moshe and about Aharon, saying, you have killed the nation of G-d" [Bamidbar 17:6]. Why did they complain? It seems clear that they are not talking about the deaths of Korach, Datan, and Aviram and their families, since Moshe and Aharon cannot be blamed for this. As Moshe told Bnei Yisrael, "If G-d creates something new, and the earth opens up its mouth to swallow them and all of their possessions, and they descend to the depths while still alive, then you shall know that these people revolted against G-d" [16:30]. In addition, Moshe explicitly warned Bnei Yisrael to stay away from the site, and the people in fact listened to this command. "And they rose up from the homes of Korach, Datan, and Aviram" [17:27]. Perhaps Bnei Yisrael's complaint referred to the deaths of the two hundred and fifty others who came to offer incense, since they were not warned in advance that their participation in the test of the incense might lead to their deaths: "We admit the sins of Datan and Aviram, who were swallowed up, but you are responsible for the deaths of the two hundred and fifty men who died like

Nadav and Avihu, since you told them to bring incense" [Rashbam].

And this explains why Bnei Yisrael called these people "the nation of G-d." As is explained in the beginning of the Torah portion, the two hundred and fifty men were "leaders of the community, those called to join in meetings, prominent men" [16:2], and they were therefore considered representatives of the entire nation. The people felt closer to these men than to Korach and his followers. Thus, they blamed Moshe and Aharon for the deaths of the men, whom they respected and revered.

However, it is still ironic that Bnei Yisrael use the phrase "the nation of G-d." The only other place where this phrase appears in the Torah is when Moshe replies to Yehoshua about Eldad and Meidad. "Are you jealous for me? I wish that all of the nation of G-d would be prophets, and that G-d would spread His spirit over them." [11:29]. And now the same phrase that Moshe used in his modesty when referring to the nation of Yisrael is being used by the people to defend those who claim that Moshe and Aharon tried to impose their rule over them.

In reaction to the complaints by Bnei Yisrael a plague began in the nation, and Moshe quickly commanded Aharon: "Take the pan and put fire on it from the Altar, and put incense on it. And go quickly to the community and atone for them, because there is anger before G-d, the plague has begun." [17:11]. This command is similar to the wording with respect to the rebels who were told to bring incense: "Here is what you should do, Korach and all of his community? take pans. And put a fire on them, and put incense on them before G-d tomorrow." [16:6-7]. In this way, Moshe teaches Bnei Yisrael that "it is not the incense that kills, rather it is the sin that kills" [Rashi], and therefore the people should not criticize Moshe and Aharon about the deaths of the rebels who brought the incense.

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**M**oshe, who is known as a person of limitless patience and tolerance, forgiving to all and the most humble of all humans, reacts apparently in an uncharacteristic manner to Korach's attack against his leadership of the Jewish people.

Moshe's aggressive stance against the rebels reveals a different motive for the attack than mere office-seeking on the part of the rebels. After all, it was Moshe himself who declared, "Would that all of the people of Israel become prophets." He tells Yehoshua not to be zealous in defense of his personal honor.

And yet with Korach and his followers, Moshe adopts a hard line and uncompromising stance. The Torah always notes when the behavior of great people appears on the surface to be uncharacteristic of their

nature and past performance. Part of the reason for the Torah's doing so is to alert us to a deeper, underlying issue. We must not be satisfied with the superficial and surface statement of facts.

The deeper issue here is that Korach wishes to convert Torah and Judaism to a man-made "democratic" faith, not its original and true source as a faith revealed to humans from on high, a faith and life system ordained in Heaven and revealed to humans. Therefore, it is not Moshe and his leadership that are the core issues in this dispute but the basic definition of Judaism- is it revealed and G-dly or man-made and invented?

On that basic core issue of Judaism, Moshe sees no room for compromise or tolerance. It is not Moshe's status that is at stake here. It is the understanding and true meaning of Judaism. Its very future is now at risk.

Even though the Talmud teaches us that the dispute of Korach against Moshe is not one that was destined to last eternally, in the sense that I have described above, it has lasted until our very day. The struggle to maintain Judaism as a G-dly revealed religion is an ongoing one. There are many forces within and without the Jewish world that have attempted and still attempt to remove the G-dly revealed part from Judaism.

Even though all of Jewish history indicates the abject failure of such an approach, it still persists in our time. It is not an attack on the Orthodox establishment- Moshe, so to speak, as is presented here-though on the surface it may be seen as such. At the root of the dispute is the view that Judaism is given from Heaven to earth and not merely a clever invention and artifice of ancient rabbis and scholars.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch once characterized the difference between Judaism and other faiths. Judaism, he said, is a religion given by G-d to define man, while the other faiths were created by man to define G-d. G-d is beyond our meager abilities to define or understand. Therefore, He gave us a Torah, the Torah of Moshe, in order to aid us to live as proper human beings and as His devoted servants.

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