

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he Korach rebellion was the single most dangerous challenge to Moses' leadership during the forty years that he led the people through the wilderness. The precise outline of events is difficult to follow, probably because the events themselves were tumultuous and disorderly. The narrative makes it clear, however, that the rebels came from different groups, each of whom had different reasons for resentment: "Now Korach, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth-descendants of Reuben-to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute. They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourself above the Lord's congregation?'"

Disentangling the various factions, Rashi suggests that Korach, prime mover of the uprising, was aggrieved that Moses had appointed Aaron as high priest. Moses was the child of Amram, Kohath's eldest son. Korach was the firstborn of Kohath's second son, Yizhar, and felt that he should have been made high priest. The fact that Moses had appointed his own brother to the role struck Korach as unacceptable favoritism.

The Reubenites, suggests Ibn Ezra, felt that as descendants of Jacob's firstborn, they were entitled to leadership positions. Ibn Ezra adds that the final straw may have been Moses' appointment of Joshua as his successor. Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph. This may have revived memories of the old conflict between the children of Leah (of whom Reuben was the firstborn) and those of Rachel, whose child Joseph was.

The 250 other rebels, Ibn Ezra conjectures, were firstborn, still unreconciled to the fact that after the sin of the golden calf, the role of special service to G-d passed from the firstborn to the tribe of Levi.

Each faction had grounds for feeling that they had been passed over in the allocation of leadership positions. The irony of their challenge is unmistakable. They pose as democrats, egalitarians: "All the community are holy, all of them... Why then do you

raise yourself above the Lord's congregation?" What they say is that everyone should be a leader. What they mean is: I should be a leader.

As for the timing of the revolt, Ramban is surely right in dating it to the period immediately following the debacle of the spies, and the ensuing decree that the people would not enter the land until the next generation. As long as the Israelites, despite their complaints, felt that they were moving toward their destination, Korach and the other malcontents had no realistic chance of rousing the people in revolt. Once they realised that they would not live to cross the Jordan, Korach knew that rebellion was possible. The people were disillusioned, and they had nothing to lose.

Thus far, the story of Korach is intensely realistic. A leader is able to mobilise a people by articulating a vision. But the journey from the real to the ideal, from starting point to destination, is fraught with setbacks and disappointments. That is when leaders are in danger of being deposed or assassinated. Korach is the eternal symbol of a perennial type: the coldly calculating man of ambition who foments discontent against a leader, accusing him of being a self-seeking tyrant. He opposes him in the name of freedom, but what he really wants is to become a tyrant himself.

What is exceptionally unusual is how the story ends. Moses had initially proposed a simple test. The rebels, and Aaron, were to prepare incense the next day. God would then signal whose offering He chose. Before this could happen, however, Moses found himself unbearably provoked by the contemptuous attitude of Dathan and Abiram. Sensing that the situation might be getting out of control, he sought an immediate and dramatic resolution: "Moses said, 'By this you shall know that it was the Lord who send me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising: if these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind, it was not the Lord who sent me. But if the Lord brings about something unheard of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned the Lord.'"

No sooner had he finished speaking, than the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels. The miracle Moses had counted on, happened. By any narrative convention we would expect that this would end the rebellion and vindicate Moses. Heaven had

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answered his call in the most dramatic way. He had been proved right. End of revolt. End of story.

This is precisely what does not happen—a powerful example of what makes the Torah so challenging, its message so unexpected. Instead of quelling the revolt, we read the following:

"The next day, the whole Israelites community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the Lord's people,' they said."

This time, it is God himself who intervenes. He tells Moses to take twelve staffs, one for each tribe, and deposit them overnight in the Tent of Meeting. The next morning, the staff bearing the name of Aaron and the tribe of Levi had sprouted, budded, blossomed and borne almonds. Only then did the rebellion end.

This is an astonishing denouement—and what it tells us is profound. The use of force never ends a conflict. It merely adds grievance to injury. Even the miracle of the ground opening up and swallowing his opponents did not secure for Moses the vindication he sought.

What ended the conflict was something else altogether: the visible symbol that Aaron was the chosen vehicle of the G-d of life. The gentle miracle of the dead wood that came to life again, flowering and bearing fruit, anticipates the famous words of the book of Proverbs about the Torah:

"It is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed." (Proverbs 3: 18)

Moses and Aaron stood accused of failing in their mission. They had brought the people out of Egypt to bring them to the land of Israel. After the debacle of the spies, that hope had died. The stick that came to life again (like Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones) symbolized that hope was not dead, merely deferred. The next generation would live and reach the destination. G-d is a G-d of life. What He touches does not die.

The episode of Korach teaches us that there are two ways of resolving conflict: by force and by persuasion. The first negates your opponent. The second enlists your opponent, taking his / her challenge seriously and addressing it. Force never ends conflict—not even in the case of Moses, not even when the force is miraculous. There never was a more decisive intervention than the miracle that swallowed up Korach

and his fellow rebels. Yet it did not end the conflict. It deepened it. After it had taken place, the whole Israelite community—the ones that had not been part of the rebellion—complained, "You have killed the Lord's people." What ended it was the quiet, gentle miracle that showed that Aaron was the true emissary of the G-d of life. Not by accident is the verse that calls Torah a "tree of life" preceded by these words:

"Its ways are ways of pleasantness, And all its paths are peace." (Prov. 3: 17)

That is conflict resolution in Judaism—not by force, but by pleasantness and peace. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

I've often heard people say, "if only God would reveal Himself miraculously, Jews would believe today much like they did when God performed wonders in Egypt and in the desert." But, surprisingly enough, from a Torah perspective, miracles have limited impact. If one claims to be a prophet by virtue of miracles he performs, the Torah states that it is not enough. Miracles do not authenticate one's prophetic mission. (Deuteronomy 13:2-6)

Our portion expands on this idea. As the earth opened up to swallow those rebelling against Moshe (Moses), the Jews seemed duly impressed. In the words of the Torah, "All Israel that were roundabout fled at the cry of them." (Numbers 16:34) Surely faith would follow such an impressive feat. By the next day, however, the impact of the miracle had waned. The Jews complained to Moshe and Aharon (Aaron) saying, "you have killed the people of the Lord." (Numbers 17:6)

In fact, miracles in the Torah usually do not have lasting effects. Consider the following: Even after the miracles of the ten plagues in Egypt, the Midrash insists that most Jews still refused to leave. Not long after the splitting of the sea, the Jews complained to God that they didn't have enough to eat and drink. Finally, while revelation is considered by many to be the most powerful intervention of God in the world, in the end, the Jews rejected the Ten Declarations, building the golden calf just forty days later.

True, many people who believe pray for miracles to reoccur and believe that our Torah reinforces the idea that miracles are the essential conduits to faith. From the Torah a reverse lesson emerges—miracles are in fact, not enough to precipitate lasting belief.

Herein lies a fundamental difference between other faiths and ours. Christianity, for example, is based on miracles performed by their man-god. In our Torah miracles play a far less important role.

Our portion reinforces this idea. In the words of Nehama Leibowitz "miracles cannot change men's minds and hearts. They can always be explained

away....Our sidra...teaches that miracles convince only those who can and are prepared to see them. Lack of faith points to a lack of will."

As has been noted-for the non-believers, miracles won't help; for believers, miracles are unnecessary. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

“We shall not come up” [Numbers 16:14]

If it is correct to say that the Book of Numbers (BaMidbar) is the saddest - and most tragic - of the five books of the Bible, then surely this week's portion of Korah is the saddest - and most tragic - portion (parsha) in this fourth book. Korah and Datan and Aviram, together with 250 of their prominent cohorts, stand up in rebellion against Moses - and not a person among the Israelites rises in defense of the foremost prophet of G-d who liberated the entire nation from Egyptian slavery (Numbers 16: 2-4). It is not the mutiny which is so difficult to understand because every great leader in history has had his/her challenges and detractors; but how can we understand a situation in which not one Israelite sees fit to attempt a counter-revolution in defense of the greatest liberator in world history!

What actually brings tears to my eyes every year at the Biblical reading is when Moses summons Datan and Aviram to a meeting - and their response is a terse and emphatic, "We shall not come up." I have ministered in the rabbinate for 45 years - and have experienced various voices of opposition both within Lincoln Square Synagogue as well as in Efrat (the two communities I have known); after all, Rav Yisrael Salanter would say, "A Rav whom everyone always likes and agrees with is no Rav and a Rav whom no one likes and agrees with is no 'mensch.'" Nevertheless, it has never happened that I've summoned one of my "rebels" to my home or office to discuss matters and that he/she has refused to come. How is it possible that Datan and Aviram could treat Moses with such disdain?

The Sefat Emet's reading of the text, emphasizing the literal translation of the words, provides a possible explanation as to why Datan and Aviram remained firm in their rebellion and wouldn't respond to Moses' call. "And Moses sent [vayishlach] to call Datan and Aviram" (16:12) - suggests that the prophet did not summon them himself but rather invited them through a messenger, he had his secretary make the call, as it were.

Nevertheless, they were in fact asked to come, and regardless of the nature of the invitation, a handwritten note on private stationery, a call from the CEO's executive assistant, the least they should have done, if only out of minimal respect for Moses' higher

station - politically, intellectually and spiritually! - was to arrive for the scheduled meeting. How are we to understand the nature of their contemptuous refusal?

I believe that if we put two and two together and read between the lines, the political sides become very clear and very sad. Except for Moses, Joshua and Caleb, virtually none of the Israelites wanted to conquer Israel. The 210 years spent in Egypt had chipped away at their collective memory of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Joseph; the promise of Israel as the place from which "all of the families of the earth would be blessed through the descendants of Abraham and Sarah" (Gen 12:3) had become a long-forgotten dream. Moses was literally isolated; his central message to conquer Israel had been overwhelmingly rejected by the very committee of scouts which he himself had hand-picked for a reconnaissance mission. Virtually the entire nation lacked the faith, the will, the idealism or the self-confidence to wage a difficult war on behalf of the land promised to the forefathers. And, adding insult to injury, Moses had communicated the doomed future of the nation - with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, they would all die out in the desert.

In the peoples' perception, had they remained tethered to Moses' leadership, the very woebegone fate he predicted would certainly overtake them. So they rejected Moses!

The political factions were divided as follows: Datan and Aviram, who never wanted to leave, were now desirous of returning to Egypt! Blaming Moses for having made the fatal error of bringing them into the desert (16:13), they even refer to Egypt as the land flowing with milk and honey. Indeed, in last week's portion of Shlach it was these two men who, in response to the scouts' report (14:3,4), were already agitating for the distraught nation to choose a new captain, an alternative to Moses, to lead the return back to Egypt. And because the purpose of their return is to assimilate into the materialistic fleshpots of Egypt, they are swallowed up by the materialistic earth (16:27-32, Ibn Ezra there). In terms of a modern perspective, the Datan-Aviram camp represent the most extreme secular and anti-Zionist voices, Jews so bereft of any connection to Judaism, blinded by the Egypts of today, such as those academic voices, on various campuses in different countries, who encourage the continued hatred and boycott of Israel.

Korah, however, was cut from a different cloth, a different rebel altogether, both zealous and jealous. Concerning Aaron, he jealously craved the priesthood, the kehunah, which guided him to make his zealous claims to Moses (16:10). His arguments effectively lauded the principle of remaining in the sanctified, rarefied, bubble-like Kollel atmosphere of the desert, perfectly content to remain there forever, never crossing the Jordan River, thereby avoiding the responsibility of establishing a state with economic, social and military challenges in Israel; he loved the manna from heaven

for food and the Divine cloud by day and fire by night which told the people when and where to go and when and where to stop. Given that Korah's burning desire was to become a Priest-Kohen who could live his entire life in the 'Eternal Kollel,' he therefore suffers the punishment of the other overly righteous "sinners" who are consumed in flames, such as Nadav and Avihu (16:35, according to Ibn Ezra). In the modern world he represents the Netura Karta's obsessive anti-Zionist position. In a sense, the episode of Korah represents what happens when very pious-looking Jews and very secular self-hating Jews join hands in rejecting Israel.

The tragedy of Moses towards the end of his life is that of a leader whose very objective - bringing the nation into Israel - is almost totally rejected by his nation, and, in the face of the vocal and bellicose rebels, finds himself abandoned. In the final analysis, however, G-d is on Moses' side, and ultimately, even if one is alone with G-d, one is never alone because one ends up with a majority of the One.

The future, however, rallies forth with hope because the next generation, learning from the punishments of their fathers, stands firmly with Joshua in conquering the Promised Land. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**A**mong those who joined Korach's rebellion were "250 men [of status] from the Children of Israel, leaders of congregations, who were summoned for all important matters (see Rashi on Bamidbar 1:16), men of renown" (Bamidbar 16:2). Rabbeinu Bachya (16:15) includes among the 250 the 12 Heads of Tribe that had brought offerings on the first days of the Mishkan (7:1-88) and were chosen by G-d to conduct the census with Moshe (1:4-16). Rashi (16:1) tells us that they were "the heads of the Supreme Courts," i.e. the top judges of the nation. In other words, this revolt was conducted by the elite of the nation, individuals from whom we would not have expected it. How could they have joined Korach's mutiny?

This question becomes even stronger when we consider that at the forefront of the rebellion were Dasan and Avirum, the same Dasan and Aviram that had challenged Moshe in Egypt (see Rashi on Shemos 2:13), were reluctant to leave even after the 10th plague had devastated Egypt (see Targum Yonasan on Shemos 14:3), rebelled against Moshe by the sea during the exodus (see Shemos Rabbah 1:29), disobeyed Moshe's command by purposely leaving over some mun until the next day (see Rashi on Shemos 16:20), disobeyed him again by going out to try collecting mun on Shabbos (see Tanchuma, Shemos 10), and tried to convince everyone to return to Egypt after the report of the spies (ibid). If this rebellion was being organized by these two known troublemakers,

rabble-rousers who had tried to undermine Moshe from the very beginning (and never stopped trying), how could such distinguished leaders fall for the ruse and join with them?

There were several attempts to return to Egypt; after crossing the sea and seeing the bodies of their Egyptian oppressors they wanted to turn around and go back to the now vacant Egypt (see Shemos Rabbah 24:2), after hearing about the Promised Land from the spies (Bamidbar 14:4), and after Aharon died and the clouds of glory departed, exposing them to their enemies (see Rashi on Devarim 10:6-7). Although the expression "let's appoint someone to be in charge, and return to Egypt" is used to describe what was said in all three cases, it is only mentioned in the Torah after the spies, indicating that this was the main "attempt" to return to Egypt. This is bolstered by the fact that when Ezra recounted the nation's history (Nechemya 9:6-37, including verses we include in our daily prayers), one of the "lowlights" mentioned was our attempt to return to Egypt (9:17), with the commentators telling us it was the attempt after the spies. The movement to return to Egypt rather than having to conquer Canaan was so great that it was recorded as a permanent blemish on the entire nation.

By the sea Moshe had to forcefully make them travel further away from Egypt rather than returning there. After Aharon's death they actually went back seven legs of the journey (encompassing eight stations) until the Levi'im forced them to return to where they were (through a civil war that spilled blood on both sides). Yet, after the report of the spies, we have no indication that they had to be prevented from retreating or that they started to return and had to be brought back. If anything, just the opposite occurred, and a small group of people tried to conquer Canaan even after Moshe told them it wouldn't work (Bamidbar 14:40-45). Why didn't they actually start to go back, since the desire to return to Egypt had been so strong and so widespread? What happened that caused them to abandon their plans and decide to stick it out in the desert instead, despite knowing that they would never make it to the Promised Land?

There are several different Midrashim that describe the movement to return to Egypt after the report of the spies. Some (e.g. Tanchuma, Shemos 10), based on the wording of "and one said to the other" (Bamidbar 14:14), describe it as Dasan and Aviram saying to each other "let's appoint someone to be in charge and return to Egypt." Others (e.g. Midrash Tehillim 106:5) have it as the nation deciding to appoint Dasan and Aviram as the "heads" to lead them back to Egypt, with Dasan replacing Moshe and Aviram taking on Aharon's role. Another version (Me'or Afaiah, see Torah Shelaimah 14:22) says that the "head" they wanted to appoint was none other than Korach. The simplest way of explaining these Midrashim is that they represent three separate opinions about how the

movement to return to Egypt started. I would like to suggest that the three approaches are one and the same, each describing a different stage of the attempt.

First, the fear of attacking Canaan led to a widespread feeling of despair, and a grassroots movement to try to return to Egypt. It was this mass desire to return to Egypt when faced with war that led G-d to take the long route from Egypt (see Rashi on Shemos 13:17). Because they had a history of opposing Moshe, Dasan and Aviram were approached by the nation to head up this return trip. However, instead of accepting the nomination to take over for Moshe and Aharon, Dasan and Sviram had a different plan. They knew, because they were Korach's neighbors (see Rashi on Bamidbar 16:1), that Korach shared the same animosity towards Moshe. They also knew that he didn't share their history of fighting against Moshe. Therefore, when they were asked to lead the return to Egypt, they nominated Korach to be the leader instead. He would give the movement more legitimacy, and he had the financial wherewithal to pull it off (see Sanhedrin 110a). He was related to Moshe and Aharon (being a Levi), so was not the "outsider" that they were. He was one of the Levi'im that carried the Holy Ark when the nation traveled (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3), so was well respected. With Korach at the helm and widespread support from the masses, there was a real possibility of a mass return to Egypt. Korach was more than happy to accept the role as the new leader, as he had felt slighted that his cousin was chosen to lead his family instead of him (see Rashi on Bamidbar 16:1). Had Korach followed through with the request to go back to Egypt, it might have actually happened. But Korach talked them out of it instead. He single-handedly stopped this revolution and convinced them that it was better to proceed under G-d's guidance, sustenance and protection in the desert than returning to Egypt and living there. What a hero.

Why was it better to stay in the desert? In the desert they were being clothed and fed by G-d, so had no concerns about making a living. They were being protected by G-d's clouds of glory, so had no concerns about being attacked by enemies. Instead of having to plow and plant and harvest (even if they could rely on the Nile for irrigation), everything was being done for them, and they could focus on spiritual growth without any distractions. Korach started a "super-kollel," where the intellectual elite could discuss the most detailed intricacies of Jewish law, and he provided all the amenities to help enhance the experience (see Sanhedrin 52a). There was a massive library (so big that they were convinced they didn't need a mezuzah by the entrance), special all-blue garments were furnished to provide a much better reminder of G-d's throne of glory than one measly blue thread could, and gourmet fleishig meals (following the highest of kashrus standards, except for the matnos-kehunah, which they thought they were exempt from since they didn't need to

interact with kohanim to enhance their relationship with G-d) were served to keep all the kollel members in good spirits while they became holier and holier. Not only did Korach convince the masses not to rebel against G-d by returning to Egypt, he became the "Rosh Kollel" (and "parnes") of the brightest and most dedicated members of the nation, in essence forming a "nation-within-a-nation," or "Adas Korach" (see Bamidbar 16:5, 6, 11 and 16).

There was one slight problem, though. His motivation wasn't to get closer to G-d, or to help others get closer to G-d, but to compete with Moshe and lead an even holier nation. But he couldn't compete with Moshe if Moshe had a special line to G-d and he didn't, if he had to wait for Moshe's instructions before taking the next step. He therefore rebelled against Moshe's authority by claiming that Moshe was making up laws himself. By that time his "elite" followers had already been wearing blue taleisim without any white fringes, learning in a Bais Midrash without a mezuzah, and eating all of the meat, even the parts that should have been given to the kohanim. Rather than admitting they had been duped, they joined the super-frum Korach in rejecting Moshe's authority. And paid the ultimate price for doing so. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**T**he Mishna teaches us that there is an opinion that the "mouth of the earth" that opened to swallow Korach and his group was created from the beginning of time. The idea here is that not only was this miracle built into nature itself to become operative at the right time and place but that the sin and rebellion that occasioned this disastrous phenomenon also is built into human nature from time immemorial.

Jealousy, the thrust for power at all costs, demagoguery and false piety are the stuff of our lives, certainly of our political and public lives. The rabbis stated that all humans feel "burned" by the honor, place and position afforded to others. This is , the rabbis teach us, even in the world to come! We resent the success of others especially if we feel that we are much more deserving of that honor and success.

Hitler was able to rouse the German people to terrible acts of war and bestial murder of innocents on the basis of jealousy, hatred and the feeling of deep resentment engendered in Germany by the results of World War I and the subsequent Versailles treaty. People feel cheated when they do not feel that they are receiving their just do even if they are wrong in what they feel entitled to.

That resentment can fester and lead to disastrous consequences as we see in this week's parsha. The rage that Korach feels at being slighted as not being chosen for the priesthood and other honors finally boils over in his attack against Moshe and

Aharon. And in the midst of a complaining, despondent and rebellious people he finds ready allies for his confrontation with Moshe.

The key to avoiding this pitfall (no pun intended) is the avoidance of arrogance and hubris - in short, humility. Maimonides abhors extremism in anything in life yet he states that when it comes to humility extremism is permitted and in fact desired. Someone who trains one's self in humility can ignore slights and insults, intended or unintended, and develops a strong self-image that can easily discount the apparent unfairness of reward and punishment in this world.

Korach complains out of weakness of his character and not out of true strength and belief in himself or in his alleged cause. Korach attempts to lower Moshe to his own level and refuses to try to raise himself to Moshe's level. He willingly associates himself with known negative characters and troublemakers in order to buttress his own ego.

So the contest devolves into the struggle between Korach's arrogance and hubris against Moshe's abject unequaled humility. In such contests throughout human and Jewish history the unlikely victor is always humility and those who practice it. That is the meaning of the words of the rabbis that from the pit of Korach's demise emanates a sound that declares Moshe and his Torah to be true. Korach's tragedy is repeated in every generation. But we should not forget that so is Moshe's triumph. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg*

**T**abbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk said: If I had been present when Korach had his dispute with Moshe, I would have joined him too. The sages emphasize that Korach was a wise man, and that he correctly predicted that a prominent dynasty would descend from him-referring to Shmuel, who was comparable to both Moshe and Aharon. This implies to us that we should take a sharp look at the approach of Korach, one which led to the birth of Shmuel and which also appeared "reasonable" to the Rabbi of Kotzk. What were the reasons for what he claimed, and why doesn't the law in fact follow his approach?

Korach's main claim against Moshe and Aharon is that "all the people of the community are holy" [Bamidbar 16:3]. This is not merely a case of a personal interest in a search for honor, it is a legitimate claim-in principle, all the people are equal when they stand before G-d. Why do we need a formal leader and a High Priest? Is it reasonable to require tzitzit on a cloak

that is made entirely of "techelet?" Should a house full of books need a mezuzah? There is an echo of Korach's ideas in modern times. This is the era of post-modern pluralism, which confuses different levels and provides equality and legitimacy for all, as if there are indeed no higher and lower levels within the world.

We have a habit of complaining about the low level of our current generation and we often link this phenomenon to the properties of the times, the "footsteps of the Mashiach," but in reality it is related to a very deep insight. It is written with respect to the entire nation of Yisrael, "And your nation are all righteous" [Yeshayahu 60:21]. All of humanity is described by the verse, "He created man in the image of G-d" [Bereishit 9:6]. Korach has a vision of the very distant future, when "no longer will every man teach his colleague and his brother to say, know G-d, for everybody will know me, from the smallest to the greatest" [Yirmiyahu 31:33].

The above words have a ring of truth. This is not something about which we have any dispute. Nobody else was comparable to Moshe in his understanding that "your nation are all righteous." He was the one who fought for them time after time and even shattered the Tablets because of them. The dispute with Korach was not about the final goal but rather about the path to be taken. Yisrael has experienced many different false messiahs, and they were all full of strong yearning for the light of redemption. All their messianic claims were false because they ignored the unique aspects of the stage which we have reached at the present time.

Everybody in the community is indeed holy, but the way to reveal the holiness of each and every individual in Yisrael is by maintaining a suitable balance among the different levels of sanctity which are currently revealed within us. These "higher and lower" levels exist for our own good. They give us the opportunity to struggle with our own internal strengths and weaknesses and make our own choices, to yearn for the good and to try to achieve it with all our efforts. The labor involved in striving for the good will allow us to forge our path to an ever higher level, mainly deep within ourselves-to attain the self-holiness that is inherent within each and every one of us, waiting for redemption. This is the grain of truth within Korach's falsity. He saw a false vision in that he did not have the patience to wait long enough for the appropriate end.

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**W**hen Moshe reprimands Korach for seeking the priesthood, he concludes: "Therefore, you and your congregation who gather together are against the Almighty; and Aharon, who is he that you complain against him?" (Numbers 16:11)

What did Moshe mean when he said, "and Aharon, who is he"?

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger comments that when someone verbally abuses a very distinguished personage and then disparages a common person, the common person won't take great offense. This is what Moshe was saying to Korach. Since you are really complaining against the Almighty, how can your words hurt Aharon? He will easily remain oblivious to what you say since he sees that you also have complaints against the Almighty.

Our lesson: When we come in contact with a very critical person, we need not take offense at what he says. This is the way he speaks to all people so there is no reason to take it personally. Realize that the problem is his, not yours, and you free yourself from any possible hurt feelings from what he says. *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Stick Figures

**T**he chronology of complaining and retribution in this week's portion is not only disheartening, it seems almost endless. First, there is the terrible Korach rebellion where this prince of Israel challenges the authority of his cousins, Moshe and Ahron. A group of the 250 rabble-rousers are consumed by fire after offering the spiritually volatile k'tores sacrifice. Korach and his close cohorts are swallowed alive as the earth opened its mouth. Then the remaining group complained, and again there was a plague. Ahron had to actually tender the feared k'tores offering and walk through the camp in order to quell the Heavenly epidemic. And again the Jews complained. Finally, to establish the Divinity of Mosaic leadership and Ahron's Priestly role, Hashem commanded Moshe to perform the ultimate sign.

"Speak to the Children of Israel and take from them one staff for each father's house, from all their leaders according to their fathers' house, twelve staffs; each man's name shall you inscribe on his staff: And the name of Aaron shall you inscribe on the staff of Levi, for there shall be one staff for the head of their fathers' house: It shall be that the man whom I shall choose -- his staff will blossom; thus, I shall cause to subside from upon Me the complaints of the Children of Israel, which they complain against you. Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a staff for each leader, a staff for each leader, according to their fathers' house, twelve staffs; and Aaron's staff was among their staffs. Moshe laid their staffs before Hashem in the Tent of the Testimony. On the next day, Moshe came to the Tent of the Testimony and behold! The staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and almonds ripened. Moshe brought out all the staffs from before Hashem to all the Children of Israel; they saw and they took, each man his staff." (Numbers 17:16-24)

A question I discussed last year seems glaring. Of what importance is it that the other princes took their sticks back. Also, why did the other princes take their sticks back. Of what value to them were those sticks, each being the same dry piece of wood?

Last week my wife and I shared the goodness of Hashem's blessings. My wife gave birth to a baby boy. As what has become almost a ritual with all my previous children, I visited my wife in the hospital together with all the newborn's siblings, (those who are home and not studying away in Yeshiva). After leaving my wife's room and our newborn son, my children stopped to peer through the large glass window of the infant nursery. All the newborns were lined up in their plastic bassinets. My older girls scanned the room "How adorable!" they whispered, balancing the excitement of the miraculous spectacle with proper hospital decorum.

My older daughters' murmuring were muffled by the "I wanna see, I wanna see" coming a few feet below from my three-year old who was too small to reach the window of the nursery. I picked him up and he looked curiously from wall to wall at the twenty-five newborns who were each in their separate compartments." "Hey, it's all the same thing!" he declared. Perhaps, in defeat, in realizing that you are not endowed with greater power, one must still realize that he still has his own identity. Even if he looks outwardly exactly like all his cohorts, there is a unique character that makes him special. And those special attributes must be seized as well.

True, Ahron's stick bloomed, while the others remained stagnant. But that is no reason to ignore them. And though they all may appear as the "same thing", their owners knew that each one had a quality, a nuance, a growth pattern or a certain form that was unique to them. They may not have been blooming sticks, they may not have sprouted almonds or yielded fruit, but to their owners they were unique! And each prince came back to reclaim not only what was his, but what was his to cherish as well. © 2002 M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

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

The answer can be found in Rashi, the great medieval commentator, who writes that just as Korach's family camped on the southern side of the Mishkan

(Tabernacle), so did the tribe of Reuven. Rashi quotes the words of Chapters of the Fathers, "woe to an evil person, and woe to his neighbor." The 250 people met their death simply because they were influenced by their neighbors (without so much as personal gain as a motivator)! This points to the awesome influence that friends, neighbors and associates have on us. So who do we surround ourselves with? Do we have positive friends and neighbors? Are WE positive friends and neighbors to others? © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**T**he midrash says: "Korach rebelled against the Torah, which is called 'strength' (p̄p̄). He did not know that his opponent was as hard as the bar on a door." Why does the midrash say that Korach rebelled against the Torah—wasn't his quarrel only with Moshe? Also, what does it mean that "his opponent was as hard as the bar on a door"?

Rav Aharon Lewin zatz'l explains: The Sefer Ha'ikkarim says that the pillar on which our acceptance of Torah depends is the belief that Moshe was the greatest prophet who ever did, or ever will, live. Since we know that no one can replace Moshe, we know that no one can replace even part of the Torah. But Korach, says Rav Lewin, did try to replace Moshe. It follows, therefore, that Korach in effect rebelled against the very Torah itself.

Moshe was like the bar on the door of a fortress, specifically the fortress of Torah, because it is Moshe's legacy which holds the Torah together. The midrash says that Korach remains in Gehinom reciting, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true." Korach did not realize that his attack on Moshe could have destroyed the entire Torah, but now he understands. Because Korach now accepts Moshe, he also acknowledges that the Torah is true. Unlike a lie which appears true at times but is revealed as untrue at other times, the truth is always true. The Torah also, Korach says, is always true because Moshe is "the bar on the door." (Hadrash Veba'iyun)

The midrash says, "What led Korach to rebel? The laws of parah adumah led him to rebel." What does this mean? Rav Chaim Yehuda Meir Hager, (the "Vishuver Rebbe") zatz'l explains that Korach was specifically misled by the law that the ashes of the parah adumah purify one who is impure, but temporarily defile the pure person who prepares them. Korach reasoned: "I know that machloket—dispute—can defile a person, but isn't it worth becoming temporarily defiled in order to bring about the pure results which I seek?"

Why was Korach wrong? Because one can never guarantee that the impurity of machloket will be only temporary. As the gemara (Sanhedrin 7a) states:

Machloket is like an overflowing canal—once the dike is breached, the opening gets wider and wider. (Zecher Chaim)

Korach's rebellion was prompted by a lust for power, writes Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik p̄"p̄, but being an intelligent man, Korach knew that his rebellion needed an ideology and a slogan. He therefore employed two main arguments, both of which, says Rav Soloveitchik, give us insight into contemporary rebellions against Torah authority.

First, Korach argued, "By what right may any Jew—even Moshe—assume leadership and power over a fellow Jew?" Every Jew, Korach maintained, was equally chosen by G-d. What Korach failed to recognize, however, is that there are two aspects to Hashem's "choice" of the Jewish people.

On the one hand, there is chosenness of the nation. Every individual possesses holiness by virtue of being a member of the Jewish people. This holiness is inherited, and it formed the basis of Korach's ideology.

There is, however, a second source of holiness: individual chosenness.

Every Jew is the direct recipient of holiness according to his own unique personal efforts and achievements. Korach did not understand that Moshe possessed a larger measure than others of this second type of holiness.

Moshe told Korach, "'Boker' - in the morning - Hashem will make known who is His" (16:5). "Boker" comes from the root "bkr" meaning, "to discriminate" or "to distinguish." In other words, Moshe explained to Korach that there are differences between people.

Korach's second argument was that every person has the right to interpret halachah for himself. What Korach failed to understand, however, is that halachah is not governed by common sense, but by a unique methodology and manner of analysis. Common sense no more governs halachah than it does physics—for example, it was once believed that objects fell because of their weight; that is what common sense dictated, but we now know that is not true.

Korach argued that each person should interpret the mitzvot in the way that will mean the most to him. Common sense supports that view, but Korach erred because it is the act of the mitzvot which is primary, while the emotion is but a reflection of the mitzvah. The halachah cannot control emotions; man is too volatile. When each person's emotions become primary, organized religion ceases to exist and all goals are soon lost sight of.

The two primary duties of the Kohen Gadol—the job that Korach sought—were lighting the menorah and burning the incense. The pure olive oil of the menorah symbolizes the clarity of mitzvah performance; the scent of the incense represents the less tangible consequences of mitzvah performance. (Shiurei Harav pp.38-45) © 1995 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org