

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI YONASON SACKS**

### TorahWeb

**T**he Avos D'Rebbe Nosson teaches that while Beis Shammai would only teach students who were fitting, modest, and G-d fearing, Beis Hillel believed in teaching every student. Similarly, the Gemarah in Maseches Berachos (28a) records that Rabban Gamliel denied access to the study hall to any student who was "ein tocho k'baro-his external behavior does not reflect his inner essence", but R' Elazar Ben Azaryah opened access to all who wished to learn. According to R' Shimon B'R Tzemach Doran, the Mishnah's imperative of "v'ha'amidu talmidim harbeh" instructs us to follow the examples of Beis Hillel and R' Elazar ben Azarya, teaching all students, regardless of intellectual or personal aptitude. R' Shimon adds that the scope of this command is two-fold. Firstly, one is commanded to teach many students at a single sitting, to ensure the proliferation of talmidei chachamim. Secondly, one must teach students in one's youth, and continue to do so in one's old age, as the Gemarah (Yevamos 62b) relates regarding R' Akiva. Although all 24,000 of R' Akiva's original students perished during the period of Sefiras HaOmer (since they did not show proper respect to one another), R' Akiva continued to teach in his old age, and established some of the greatest scholars our nation has ever known: R' Meir, R' Nechemia, R' Yehuda, R' Shimon, R' Elazar.

The devastating loss and subsequent replacement of R' Akiva's students may further shed light on our Mishnah. R' Asher Weiss (Sichos al HaTorah, Parshas Kedoshim) questions the seemingly draconian punishment of R' Akiva's students: granted that one is obligated to show honor to respect to another, but does the failure to do so warrant death? R' Weiss explains that perhaps R' Akiva's students were held to a higher standard, as they were expected to be "ma'atikei hashamuah"-promulgators of the teachings of R' Akiva to future generations. R' Akiva himself both exemplified and taught the highest standard of interpersonal conduct. For example, later in Maseches Avos (3:14), R' Akiva teaches, "chaviv adam shenivra b'tzelem-Dear is man, for he was created in the image (of G-d)." Similarly, R' Akiva's statement from the Toras Kohanim, "v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho zeh klal gadol baTorah-Love your neighbor as yourself'-this is a great principle in the Torah"- is often cited. R' Akiva's entire

essence pertained to interpersonal love and respect. Because his students failed to follow their Rebbe's example, and perhaps more significantly, to transmit his teachings in a pure, unadulterated fashion, they received a harsh punishment.

R' Weiss continues that although the early students of R' Akiva met an untimely end bereft of any lasting legacy, R' Akiva's later students, "raboseinu shebadarom-our rabbis from the South," rose to unparalleled heights under the tutelage of their teacher. In fact, the Gemarah (Sanhedrin 86a) teaches that the majority of the corpus of the Oral Law consists of these students' teachings: an anonymous Mishnah is attributed to R' Meir; an anonymous Sifra to R' Yehudah; an anonymous Sifrei to R' Shimon; and an anonymous Tosefta to R' Nechemia. Thus, these students clearly succeeded.

In fact, R' Weiss notes, if one looks further, the teachings of each one of "raboseinu shebadarom" exemplified interpersonal traits, echoing the words of their teacher R' Akiva. For example, R' Meir teaches (Tanchuma Vayechi 2) "kol hamevarech es Yisroel k'ilu mevarech es Hashechinah-one who blesses Israel is like one who blesses the Divine Presence", and (Avos 4:10) "hevei shfal ruach bifnei kola dam-be lowly of spirit before every person. Moreover, the Yerushalmi (Sota 1:2) relates R' Meir's own personal stellar interpersonal character traits.

Similarly, R' Yehuda teaches (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:15) that "kol hamekabel pnei chaveirav k'ilu mekabel pnei Hashechinah-one who greets one's fellow is like one who greets the Divine Presence". R' Yosei ben Chalafta, who was also among the final students of R' Akiva, teaches (Shabbos 118a), "miyomai lo avarti al divrei chaverai, yodeah ani b'atzmi she'eini kohein, v'af al pi kein im omrim li chaveirai aleh laduchan hayisi oleh-all my days, I never violated the words of my friend; I know that I am not a Kohen, but if my friend instructed me to ascend to the platform (upon which the Kohanim bless the nation), I would do so". Similarly, (Bava Metzia 33a) "d'adilu lo hey'ir (chaveiro) einav ela b'mishna achas hu rabbo-even if one's friend merely helped one understand a single Mishnah, (one's friend) is considered one's Rebbe (worthy of honor)". R' Shimon also underscored the importance of interpersonal conduct, teaching (Berachos 43b)"noach lo la'adam sheyapeel atzmo l'kivshan hoeish v'al yalbin penei chaveiro borabbim-better that one throw oneself into a fiery furnace rather than whiten the face of (i.e.,

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embarrass) one's friend in public". R' Elazar ben Shamoa also stressed these aspects, teaching (Avos 4:15), "yehi kvod talmidcha chaviv alecha k'shelach ukvod chavercha k'morah rabboch umorah rabboch k'morah shomayim-let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own honor, and the honor of your friend like the honor of your Rabbi, and the honor of your Rabbi like the honor of Heaven". Finally, R' Nechemia stressed (Shabbos 32b) that through the sin of baseless hatred, strife emerges in one's home.

What emerges from all of these sources is that, like their Rebbe, R' Akiva's later students exemplified the importance of interpersonal conduct. Perhaps it was specifically through this emphasis-not their brilliance or intellectual acumen-that they merited to become the progenitors of our Oral Tradition. It is in the merit of these giants that our Torah is still transmitted to this very day. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Sacks & The TorahWeb Foundation

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**A**fter Dusun and Avirum refuse Moshe's request that they meet with him face-to-face (Bamidbar 16:12), they verbally attack him (16:13-14). Their refusal is then punctuated with these enigmatic words (pardon my opening translation): "Will you gouge out the eyes of those men? We will not go up (i.e. appear before you)!" What do these words mean? Did they really think that Moshe might gouge out anyone's eyes?

Rashi understands these words as one statement; "even if you send someone to gouge out our eyes if we do not go up to you, we will not go up." Even though the eyes being gouged out belonged to "them," they really meant themselves, but they didn't want to talk about themselves being harmed. The commentators explain why Rashi uses this approach, including how what seems to be a question can be a statement (see Gur Aryeh), Nevertheless, unless they thought that Moshe might actually physically blind them, the choice of the perceived threat, and the graphic means used to describe how he would blind them, seems a bit peculiar. The Or Hachayim says that they were using an example of the kind of pain and suffering they would prefer to endure rather than having to

appear before Moshe. Still, there must be a reason why they chose this specific example.

Rashbam is among the numerous commentators (e.g. Midrash Agada and Chizkuni) that explain these words metaphorically; "Do you think that these men complaining against you have no eyes to see?" They aren't blind, and can see what you have done to them (and haven't done for them), bringing them out of a very good land (Egypt), promising them a better one but only bringing them into the desert to die. Rabbeinu Bachye quotes a similar approach (likely referring to the Tur), but instead of "them" referring to those complaining, it refers to those that came out of Egypt (even those that aren't actually complaining). Other variations on this include the approach of the Tzaidah LaDerech, where the blindness they are accusing Moshe of trying to cause would be brought about by bribing them; "will you cause them to turn a blind eye by giving them prominent leadership positions?" In order to address the issue of it being "them" that will be blinded (and not "us," i.e. Dusun and Avirum), the Tzaidah LaDerech suggests that they are saying "even if you bribed us, causing us to disregard what you have done, will you be able to blind all the others" that are part of the rebellion? Ibn Ezra suggests that the "them" are the elders that had remained on Moshe's side (see 16:25), with Dusun and Avirum telling Moshe that eventually he will lose all of his support. Tzror Hamor understands the "them" to be the Levi'im, i.e. even if you could blind them, convincing your own Tribe that they "have plenty" and shouldn't want the Priesthood too, we (Dusun and Avirum) cannot be blinded, and will not "go up" (see Alshich). Similarly, the Malbim says that Dusun and Avirum were saying that even if you could fool everyone else, you can't fool us.

The Kesav Sofer suggests that Dusun and Avirum's response to Moshe was a long accusation that he craved leadership and did things in order to attain and maintain it; he took them out of Egypt so that he could be their leader, and, knowing that he wouldn't be their leader once they reached the Promised Land, conspired to delay them for decades in the wilderness. Doing so prevented the next leaders, the "eyes" of the nation, from taking over, so they were accusing Moshe of "gouging out" (keeping down) the "eyes" (leaders) of "those men" (the rest of the nation).

After giving two ways of understanding the words of Dusun and Avirum metaphorically (either they are stating that even a blind person can tell that Moshe has little substance to back him up or they are asking if Moshe plans to blind them so that they won't understand the wrong being done to them), the Pa'anayach Raza (one of the later Tosafists) suggests that the "them" refers to the nations living in Canaan, i.e. "even if you blind those in Canaan (such as with the poison of the hornets, see Rashi on Shemos 23:28) we will not be able to go up and conquer them because they are so strong." (HaKesav VeHaKabbala

understands Targum Yonasan to be saying this as well.) This is also the second approach suggested by R' Chaim Paltiel; his first is that until Moshe is able to blind the nations in Canaan (i.e. conquers them), they will not answer his summons. Targum Yonasan also understands the "them" as being the nations in Canaan, but takes a slightly different approach with some understanding the suggestion to be that Dusun and Avirum were saying that Moshe won't be able to blind those living in Canaan, and therefore will be unable to conquer it. The Rokayach gives a fourth variation on this theme, suggesting that the Amori'im (one of the primary nations living in Canaan) will blind the eyes of the Children of Israel, i.e. they will prevent them from "going up" and conquering the land.

The Rokayach's second approach is also interesting; Dusun and Avirum will not meet with Moshe, in essence gouging out the eyes of Moshe and Aharon by refusing to answer his summons. The Ran (Moed Katan 16a), Midrash Hacheifetz, and Midrash Lekach Tov also explain the "them" to be referring to Moshe and Aharon, with Yalkut M'or Afeila suggesting that Dusun and Avirum didn't use the word "them" (but said "your eyes," i.e. Moshe's); the Torah itself changed it to "them" in deference to Moshe.

The term for "gouging out eyes" ("nikur einayim") is used elsewhere in Tanach, and, as Rav Elchanan Samet ([www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.63/38korach.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.63/38korach.htm)) points out, it is meant literally (not metaphorically). Shimshon's eyes were literally gouged out by the Pelishtim (Shoftim 16:21). When Nachash the Amoni threatened the city of Yavesh Gilad (Shemuel I 11:1), he would only agree not to attack them if everyone gouged out their right eye (11:2; see Rashi who explains it both literally and metaphorically). In Mishlay (30:17), Shelomo HaMelech speaks of the eyes of a disobedient son being gouged out by a raven. Quoting Shemuel Rubinstein's "Kadmonius HaHalacha," Rav Samet suggests that having a gouged out eye was a symbol of slavery, as evidenced by what was done to Shimshon, what Nachash wanted to do to the people of Yavesh Gilad, and Nevuchadnetzar blinding Tzidkiyahu HaMelech before locking him up in chains and bringing him to Bavel (Melachim II 25:7). [This gives added perspective to the Torah setting a slave free if his eye is knocked out by his master (Shemos 21:26); whereas other cultures maimed their slaves in order to brand them, the Torah not only forbids maiming slaves, but makes it have the exact opposite affect, as the slave attains freedom instead.] Based on this, Rav Samet says that Dusun and Avirum were paralleling their earlier statement against Moshe's leadership (Bamidbar 16:13) by asking (rhetorically) whether Moshe planned on gouging out their eyes, i.e. treating them as slaves.

Another approach suggested by Rav Samet is based on Professor Moshe Weinfeld writing (in "Olam HaTanach") that gouging out the eyes "was a common

punishment for rebellion in the ancient east (and especially in the areas of the Hittites). Indeed, one Hittite document contains a threat of putting out eyes for failure to appear before the ruler: "When you receive the letter, present yourself immediately; if not-your eyes will be put out." Although Rav Samet does not suggest that Dusun or Avirum really feared that Moshe would do this to them (or they would have obliged), he does say that it is part of their attack on Moshe's leadership, as they were asking (rhetorically) if Moshe was going to treat them as others rulers treat those that disobey them.

Based on these suggestions, I would like to take it a step further. If gouging out an eye was the norm for branding someone as a slave, it makes sense that the punishment for disobeying the ruler was to be treated as less than a peasant, to be maimed the way a slave was, to show that this "rebel" is really the ruler's subject. Dusun and Avirum knew that Moshe wouldn't do this, but were continuing their verbal attack by comparing Moshe's edicts with those of the native (primitive?) cultures. "You (Moshe) claim that your teachings, your laws and edicts (such as Aharon being the Kohain Gadol, the first born being replaced by the Levi'im, and Yosef getting Reuvein's double-portion in the Promised Land), come directly from the Creator, and are therefore superior (intellectually and morally) to every other system of law, but we deny that. We think you are no different than any other ruler, making laws as you see fit (including giving family members better positions)." And, to drive the point home, they added "will you treat us in the same barbaric way as other rulers, gouging out our eyes for refusing to present ourselves before you? Your edicts are no different (or better) than theirs anyway, so why should the way you treat those that disagree with you be any different?" Although they knew that Moshe would never do such a thing, the point they were making was evident. "You do not have the divine authority to order us around, so we will not go up (before you)." © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**F**rom the time that Moshe (Moses) comes on the scene, he is under attack. As he breaks up a fight between Jews while still in Egypt, one turns to him and says, "who made you a ruler and judge over us." (Exodus 2:14) And when it appears to the people that Moshe descends from Sinai a bit late, they rebel and build the golden calf. (Exodus 32:1) All this comes to a head in this week's portion when Korach and his cohorts challenge Moshe's rule. In their words "you (Moshe) take too much upon yourself." (Numbers 16:3)

Important lessons emerge: First Moshe teaches that it is critical for religious leaders to become involved in social action. After all, time and time again Moshe not only teaches purely religious principles, but also how the

Jewish people must function as a people, a nation with laws, government and showing concern for all.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha Kohen Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel, argued that there is no such thing as the unholy; there is only the holy and the not yet holy. From this perspective, every day life-the way one eats, works, and, yes, engages in politics-is as holy as prayer, Torah study and meditation. For Rav Kook, speaking out for Am Yisrael is, in its purest form, the deepest expression of Jewish spirituality. This is precisely what Moshe teaches. That rabbis, people of the spirit, are especially trained to infuse all aspects of life with spirituality.

There is another lesson that can be learned. Inevitably, when one becomes involved in leadership, they will incur the wrath of some. A wise, elderly man taught me this lesson. On the day I left my first pulpit in St. Louis, he approached me and said, "Rabbi, I bless you that you should have many enemies." I looked at him startled. "We've been close, why such a harsh lesson?" "My words are meant as a blessing," he responded. "Remember, if you do nothing, you have no enemies. A sign that you're doing, that you're taking stands is that you have enemies."

Even Moshe, who contributed more than anyone to the Jewish people, is not loved by everyone. Korach rebels against him. That's the price of strong leadership.

Too many rabbinic leaders shy away from taking strong political positions, fearful that they will alienate their boards and congregants. They forget the warning of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, that a rabbi who lacks strong convictions is a failing rabbi. © 2010 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.

#### **CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

If you seek to understand an accusation, look at the accuser, not the accused. Think, for example, about one of the most famous of anti-Semitic myths: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (the classic account is Norman Cohn's Warrant for Genocide; more recently the distinguished Israeli jurist Hadassa Ben Itto published her own account, *The Lie That Wouldn't Die*).

According to the Protocols, Jews form a secret conspiracy that controls the world's banks, media, economies and politicians. To those who know the tragic depths of Jewish history, no myth could be more ironic. Jews have almost never united for anything for very long. Jewish history is a series of variations on the theme of disagreement and division. Though some individual Jews have from time to time held positions of power, the Jewish people as a whole has been marked by powerlessness. Indeed while the Protocols were being concocted, Jews were being slaughtered in

pogroms throughout Russia. Most significantly, Jews constitute one of the few civilizations in history that has never dreamed of building an empire. From a Jewish perspective, The Protocols are unintelligible.

But from the perspective of its author it was very intelligible indeed. It was written-as newly published Russian archives confirm-at the turn of the twentieth century by a Russian aristocrat exiled in France, Mathieu Golovinski, who wrote it for the Russian secret police, to convince Czar Nicholas II that Jews were behind the political unrest in Russia and to persuade him to abandon liberal reforms. To do so, he plagiarized a satirical essay by French attorney Maurice Joly, *The Dialogues in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* (1864), replacing Napoleon III-the villain of the original text-with the Jews. It was a crude fabrication, exposed as a forgery by *The Times* of London in 1921, and a court in Berne in 1935. The fact that it is well-known to be a forgery has not stopped it being a best seller ever since, first in Nazi Germany, now throughout much of the Arab world.

Secret conspiracies and dreams of empire make no sense within Judaism's universe of thought. But to members of the secret police in the last years of Czarist Russia it made very good sense indeed. It was a projection onto an outsider of a fantasy they themselves held. If you seek to understand an accusation, look at the accuser, not the accused.

The Korach rebellion, the most serious of the many challenges to Moses' leadership, was a complex affair. As the commentators point out, there was not one party to the rebellion but three, each with its own grievance. There was Korach himself, Moses' and Aaron's cousin, indignant that the supreme leadership positions had gone to one family, the sons of Amram, while he, the eldest son of Amram's brother Yitzhar, had had no equivalent honour. There were the Reubenites, Datan and Aviram, who felt that their tribe-that of Jacob's firstborn son-had not received its due share of leadership roles. And there were the 250 community leaders who may have felt that they had not been given appropriate honour in the service of the sanctuary. Some suggest that they were representatives of the firstborn, who felt aggrieved that, after the Golden Calf, their priestly function was transferred to the tribe of Levi.

The precise details of the narrative are complex, but one thing is luminously clear: the accusation the rebels made against Moses and Aaron: "They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above (titnas'u) the Lord's assembly?'" (Num. 16:3)

Two of the rebels, Datan and Aviram, went further: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it (tistarer) over us?" (16:13)

Applied to Moses, the accusations are unintelligible. This is the man of whom we read, a mere four chapters back: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth." That such a man would "set himself above" others, or "lord it over them" is palpably absurd. There is only one way of making sense of the rebels' claim. If you seek to understand an accusation, look at the accuser, not the accused.

Korach, Datan, Aviram and their co-conspirators saw leadership as status, power, dominance, superiority. That is what they sought for themselves. But Jewish leadership is not like that-on principle, it cannot be like that. Were it so, it would be unconscionable. Judaism is built on the premise of the non-negotiable dignity of the human person. No leader is allowed to "lord it over" those he or she leads. The Torah says of even a king of Israel that that he must not "act haughtily towards his fellows" (Deut. 17:20).

The sages said the same. The Talmud (Hagigah 5b) says that "When a leader lords it over a community, the Holy One weeps every day because of him." The Midrash Tanchuma comments on the verse (Deut. 29:9) "All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your G-d-leaders of your tribes, your elders and officials-all the men of Israel". The difficulty is obvious: the verse begins by talking about leaders, and ends by talking about "all the men of Israel". The Midrash reads it thus: "[G-d said to them], 'Even though I have appointed for you leaders, elders and officials, all of you are equal before Me'-that is why it says, 'all are men of Israel.'"

Few propositions proved to be more fateful to the history of Israel, because of one specific event. Towards the end of the reign of King Solomon, the people grew restless at the burden he had placed on them, in part because of the building of the Temple. When the king died, the people formed a delegation-led by an ambitious would-be leader, Jeroboam-to Solomon's son Rehoboam. They had a simple and specific demand: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." (I Kings 12:4)

Rehoboam told them to come back in three days' time and he would give them an answer. He then went to the elders who had been his father's counselors. "What would you advise me to say?" he asked. Their answer is fascinating: "If today you will be a servant (eved) to these people and serve them (va-avad'tem) and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants (avadim)." (I Kings 12:7)

The task of a king, they said, is to serve the people, not to impose burdens on them. It was wise advice. Unfortunately, Rehoboam, young, impetuous, ignored it. Instead he asked his friends, with whom he had grown up. Their advice was the opposite. In effect, they said: Show them who is boss. Tell them: "My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on

you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

Rehoboam did so. The result was predictable. The majority of the people followed Jeroboam. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the king. The kingdom split in two. It was the beginning of the end of the first commonwealth. Authoritarian leadership-in which the leader sets himself above and lords it over the people-has never been acceptable in Israel.

There is a fascinating passage in the Talmud (Horayot 10 a-b) in which Rabban Gamliel wanted to appoint two rabbis, Elazar Chisma and Yochanan ben Gudgada, to leadership positions. They were reluctant to accept. Rabban Gamliel then said to them: "Do you suppose I am conferring rulership (serarah) on you? No: I am conferring service (avdut) on you."

A true leader is the servant of those he or she leads. That is what Moses understood, and what Korach and his fellow rebels did not. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

#### RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

## RavFrand

*Transcribed by David Twersky;*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman*

**T**he main topic of Parshas Korach is inner-communal squabbling amongst the Jewish people (machlokes). Unfortunately, machlokes has been around from the beginning of time (going back to Kayin and Hevel in Parshas Bereshis). There were only 4 people in the universe at that time and they could not get along. The two who argued were brothers. It is no surprise, then, that machlokes is still around until this very day in our very diverse world and in our very diverse communities.

Parshas Korach is the paradigm parsha for teaching what to do to avoid prolonging machlokes. The Gemara [Sanhedrin 110a] derives from the fact that Moshe sought out Dasan and Aviram to try to bring the dispute to an end that one should not persist in an argument. Rashi says that we learn this from the fact that Moshe was willing to forgo his honor and protocol and personally seek out those who started the rebellion against him- to try to make peace. Some enumerators of the commandments actually count "And there shall no longer be like Korach and his followers" [Bamidbar 17:5] as one of the 365 forbidden actions (Lavim) in the Torah? namely that one should not persist in a machlokes.

There is some irony in the fact that the Torah just told us that Moshe was the most humble man on the face of the earth [Bamidbar 12:3] and the fact that Korach and his followers claimed that Moshe was "exalting himself over the congregation of Hashem" [Bamidbar 16:3]. Despite the fact that these other people started the fight and they hurled the most absurd

and inflammatory charge against Moshe, Moshe himself (who was the prophet of G-d and the King of Israel) went to seek peace with these two obnoxious people (the same two people who slandered him in the past to Pharaoh and almost cost him his life in Egypt). Moshe swallowed his pride and his honor and tried to take Dasan and Aviram aside and reason with them logically against the folly of their rebellion. The Talmud derives from here that one should not persist in an argument, but should take the initiative to bring it to an end.

When two people get into a fight and someone goes to one of the parties and asks him to "make shalom", typically the response is "Why should I sue for peace? I am right. He wronged me. Let him come ask me for peace!" Moshe Rabbeinu's actions here teach us the impropriety of such a response. One will never be more "right" in a machlokes than Moshe was in his dispute with Korach. Despite that fact, it was Moshe who tried to end the argument and make peace.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once explained that the pasuk "And there shall no more be like Korach and his followers" is not only a negative transgression, but it is a prediction as well. There will never again be such a one sided argument, where one party was so clearly right and the other party so clearly wrong as in this case of Korach and his followers arguing with Moshe Rabbeinu. This was a case where one side was 100% right and the other side 100% wrong. Never again would there be such a morally lopsided argument.

The following story illustrates this concept. (The names in the following true story have been changed to protect the innocent.) Reuven had a subscription to the NY Times. His neighbor Shimon did not subscribe to the Times. However, Reuven noticed every morning that his NY Times had already been read before he brought it in the house. Shimon had known that Reuven would pick the paper up from his porch at 7:00 AM, so he came by at 6:00 AM, brought the paper into his own house, read it for 45 minutes and then re-folded it up and returned it to Reuven's porch. Reuven suspected this and woke up early one morning and caught Shimon in the act. He challenged him, "How dare you take my paper before I read it!" Shimon responded back "What are you getting so excited about? You're acting like a Sodomite. I get benefit and you lose nothing. You have no right to complain about what I'm doing."

Reuven was at his wits end. He did not know what to do, so he consulted his Rabbi. He wanted to take Shimon to a Din Torah. The Rabbi told Reuven he had good advice for him: Buy your neighbor a subscription to the NY Times. Reuven could not believe his ears. "What? My neighbor steals my paper and I should buy him a subscription to the NY Times? Rabbi, Are you out of your mind?"

Ultimately, however, Reuven listened to his Rabbi's advice and years later he admitted that his purchase of the NY Times subscription for his neighbor was the best investment he ever made! He now not only

can read a clean newspaper in the morning without coffee stains, but he also still has good relations with his neighbor!

Reuven was certainly not obligated to buy his neighbor a subscription to the paper. Perhaps Reuven was not even obligated to forgive his neighbor for taking his own paper without offering to pay something. But, sometimes that which is ethically appropriate to do should take precedence over what one is legally entitled to do.

But, one may ask: It cost Reuven money to buy that subscription for his neighbor. Why should he have to do that? The answer, the Chofetz Chaim says, is as follows: An Esrog and lulav costs money. Matzos costs money. Making Pesach costs money. Kosher meat costs money. Every year a person has to make a calculation that he needs X amount of money for mitzvos. The Chofetz Chaim says a person should put away money at the beginning of the year in a "machlokes fund". This is the money earmarked to forgo or to layout to avoid machlokes, to preserve peace among family and community members.

The Medrash at the end of Parshas Tzav states: Chizkiya stated "Great is peace, for by all other mitzvos the Torah specifies 'If'? If you happened to see your friend's item is lost; If you happen to see your friend's donkey straining under its load; If you happen to see a bird's nest. Meaning if the mitzvah happens to come to your hand, you do it, otherwise you do not need to do it. However, in connection with peace the Torah teaches "Seek out peace, and chase after it" [Tehillim 34:15].

If we need to pay for matzah and for lulav and for tephillin and for everything else, we need to pay for Shalom as well. Where did that money for the subscription to the NY Times come from? It came from Reuven's "Shalom fund". Money from that account is the best money a person spends the entire year!  
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#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd Korah, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi took Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav... and they rose up in confrontation before Moses..." (Numbers, 16:1,2)

Why didn't the Israelites rise up against the rebels who dared defy Moses, the selfless man of G-d who gave up a luxurious and carefree life as Prince of Egypt in order to liberate a slave people from tyranny?

Reading between the lines of this amazing story, we discern two distinct ideological positions and political platforms, which between them represented the majority of Hebrews. Both these positions were antithetical to everything that Moses stood for and the adumbrations of the Korah Wars are still to be heard

today, thousands of years later, festering at the very heart of Israeli society.

Before we analyze the exact nature of Korah's rebellion, two factors should be kept in mind. First, the commandment to wear ritual fringes on four-cornered garments (tzitzit), which closed last week's portion of Shelah, serves as an excellent introduction to and eventual rebuttal of the movements that Korah, and Datan and Aviram, represent.

Secondly, Moses' announcement that the entire generation, with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb, was condemned to die in the desert (Numbers 14:26-39) made the Hebrews ripe for rebellion.

Moses attempts to deal with Korah, and then with Datan and Aviram separately. This is not only to "divide and conquer," but rather the Torah's way to emphasize how they represent different approaches in their opposition, different "political parties," as it were.

Korah, called by the Kotzker Rebbe "the holy grandfather," uses the democratic argument of "equality in holiness" against Moses and Aaron: "It has been enough leadership for you, all the people in the witness-community are holy with the Lord in their midst. Why must you set yourselves up to be on a higher plane than the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3).

And if Korah sees no differences in holiness between different people, and rejects the unique status of Aaron and his sons as Kohanim, it stands to reason that he would also deny any distinction in holiness between different lands, refusing to recognize the special sanctity of the Land of Israel. After all, the Revelation at Sinai took place in the desert, outside the geographic boundaries of the land of Israel. If G-d is within all of us and the entire nation heard the Revelation - then the Lord of the cosmos is certainly within the desert, the very place where that Revelation took place.

Korah's position rejects the Aaronic priesthood as well as the idea that the entire "desert generation" must be punished for their refusal to conquer the Land of Israel. From Korah's point of view, these are false claims instituted by Moses rather than reflections of the true will and word of G-d (see Moses' defense of himself: 16:28). Moreover, Korah justifies the Israelites' desire to remain in the desert precisely because of the desert's holiness, an ideal and idyllic setting for living their lives. For Korah and his sympathizers, the desert is not the place of punishment, but a perfect and perennial kollel institute of higher learning. G-d is their Rosh Yeshiva, communicating the "shiur" material to Moses. G-d also provides the daily portions of manna sufficient for their nutritional needs, He determines when the camp will travel and protects the people from the physical elements with His special "clouds of glory."

Why leave this ethereal, spiritual haven for the wars, political arguments, economic crises and social challenges necessary to establish a nation state? For reasons of "frumkeit" (religiosity) alone, Korah argues

that the Israelites are better off remaining in the desert-kollel, freed from all decision-making and responsibility.

Moses is willing to call Korah's bluff. He instructs him to take his entire party of 250 men the next day and to provide each of them with a fire-pan and incense for a special "priestly" offering, to see whose offering would be acceptable to G-d. The Divine decision was not long in coming: "A fire came down from G-d and it consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense," including Korah himself! (16:25, Ibn Ezra ad loc).

Even if Korah's quest for "desert-kollel sanctity" had been sincere, it did not reflect G-d's mission for Israel. G-d wants us to establish a nation-state and to take responsibility to perfect an imperfect world, with all of the challenges that entails.

This is the message of the ritual fringes: the white strings represent the white wool of the sheep, the animalistic aspect of our lives and our world. These must be sanctified by the sky-blue color of t'chelet, the symbol of the Divine seen by the elders at the time of the Revelation at Sinai (Exodus, 24:10). When we gaze upon the ritual fringes, we must remember our true mission: to enter history, to risk impurity by taking up the challenges of the real world, and to assume our responsibility to become a "sacred nation and kingdom of Priest-Teachers" to the world (Exodus, 19:6 S'forno ad loc).

Datan and Aviram had a different political agenda. They refused to attend a meeting with the greatest prophet and the most successful liberator in history, claiming: "Isn't it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, only to kill us off in the desert? With what right do you rule, yes rule, over us?!" (Numbers 16:13). The Midrash identifies them with the old enemies of Moses from the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the "fighting Israelites" who questioned Moses' right to kill the Egyptian taskmaster. They never wanted to leave Egypt in the first place but, unlike Korah, the last thing they want is to remain behind in the desert. They hankered after the "fleshpots" of Egypt. They would love to assimilate into the "Big Apple." They remember the "...fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic" of Egypt, and they believe that this desert fiasco justifies their earlier opposition. They are certain that if they could only return to Egypt and forget their Biblical traditions and values, they would be accepted as Egyptians and benefit from the material advantages of the most powerful country in the world.

They too are punished by G-d, who causes the earth for which their materialistic spirits yearned so mightily to swallow them up alive (Numbers, 16:35 Ibn Ezra ad loc). Because of their passion for physical pleasures, they never learn to look properly upon the t'chelet of the ritual fringes. They saw neither the royal blue of their majestic ancestry - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, passionate followers of G-d and lovers of the



Land of Israel - nor the sapphire blue of the Divine presence in the world summoning us to His service.

Israel - the modern state - has yet to learn these lessons. © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

**T**ragedy follows tragedy in the book of Bamidbar. The unwarranted complaints of the people regarding the food in the desert and the false report regarding the Land of Israel that was discussed in last week's parsha end in plague, punishment and disaster. This week's parsha describes the rebellion of Korach and his cohorts against Moshe and the supremacy of Torah within Jewish society.

It seems that there is a latent death wish that lurks within Jewish society that does not allow it to free itself from repeating terrible mistakes over and over again. The generation of the desert saw miracles, even G-d's presence, so to speak, on a regular basis and nevertheless constantly escalates its defiance and rebellion against its special role in human civilization.

It really is a form of regret on the part of many Jews in the desert to having accepted the Torah carte blanche at Sinai. This group did not intend to be a chosen people. The plaintive cry of "let us just return to Egypt" is really a cry that "we wish to be just like all other peoples!" And it is a situation that repeats itself in almost every generation of Jewish life.

The struggle within Jews and Jewish society in all ages is whether to accept its G-d-given role as a "treasure amongst all nations" or to somehow renounce all pretense of being a special people. The choices are not really portrayed as being that stark. Rather, it reflects itself in a continuum of Jewish observance, adherence to Jewish values and the willingness to remain proudly Jewish in a world that is hostile to Jews, a Jewish state and Judaism itself.

Korach wraps his personal animosity towards Moshe and his frustration of not achieving the recognition that he feels is due him within a cloak of holiness and altruism. Hypocrisy always abounds, especially amongst those that judge others. The self-righteous give righteousness itself a bad name.

The claims of Korach which he speaks in the name of democracy, that all the people are holy and worthy of leadership, resound in classical correctness. They are hard to argue against and certainly have great public resonance and appeal. The problem with Korach's appeal and words is that they are basically fraudulent.

Moshe's stature is determined by G-d and has been vindicated throughout the ages of Jewish history. There are no truly unbiased people in the world. But there are those that, at the very least, recognize their bias and attempt to deal with it honestly and intelligently.

Hypocrisy is the attempt to cover up the bias with false nobility of purpose and affected altruism.

It is a reprehensible character trait, far greater in potential destructiveness than is open enmity itself. This is what made Korach so dangerous and why Moshe's determination to publicly expose and punish him so strident and insistent. The tragedy of Korach lies not only his own personal downfall but rather in the havoc and confusion that it created in the Jewish society. It is a situation that repeats itself today as well. © 2010 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

### **RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

## **A Costly Choice**

**“T**hose that are to be redeemed-from one month shall you redeem according to the valuation, five silver shekels by the sacred shekel; it is twenty gera." (18:16)

In this week's parsha the Torah lists the various gifts that are given to the Kohain. Among them we find the five shekalim that a father gives the Kohain for the redemption of his firstborn son. At the ceremony of the Pidyon Haben, the redemption of the firstborn, Chazal established that the Kohain asks the father the following question: "Mai ba'is tfay?"-"Which do you prefer? Would you rather keep the five shekalim or take the child?" At first glance, this appears to be a ludicrous question, for no father would choose the money over his son. Furthermore, the implication that the father has the option of leaving his son with the Kohain in exchange for keeping the money is not halachically correct; the Torah requires a father to redeem his son. (See Kiddushin 29a) Additionally, the child is not the property of the Kohain, and if, theoretically, the father would refuse to redeem his child, the Kohain would have no claim to the child. (See the Sefer Chut Hashani who discusses this issue.) Therefore, what was Chazal's intention when they incorporated this question into the Pidyon Haben ceremony? © 2010 Rabbi Y. Zweig and torah.org



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