

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What was the real attraction of Korach's rebellion to all of the Hebrews? There must have been more to his argument than mere personal gain, since not a single member of the congregation took a stand on behalf of Moses.

At this time, the Scouts had pretty much squelched the dream of conquering Israel - so the question was where to go? There were Hebrews represented by Datan and Aviram who probably never wanted to leave Egypt in the first place and now yearned to return there. They joined the chorus of the ten scouts "... It is better for us to return to Egypt... Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4,5). They restate this desire in this week's Biblical reading when they taunt Moses, "Is it not enough that you took us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the desert, that you must also rule over us...?" (Num 16:13).

But this is clearly not Korach's argument; he is coming from an altogether different place: "...for the entire congregation is holy and have G-d in their midst. Why must you lift yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (16:3). Moses charges Korach with wanting to be a holy Kohen-priest (16:10), and therefore tests Korach and his group with the censers of incense.

I believe that Korach is going further than that; he wants all the Hebrews to become Kohen-priests. After all, "the entire congregation is holy and have G-d in their midst" - both literally in terms of being created in G-d's image and figuratively in terms of their relationship to the Sanctuary - Mishkan - Shekinah. And did not everyone hear G-d's voice at Sinai, and did not Moses charge the whole assembly of Israel with being a "Kingdom of Kohen-priests"? (Ex. 19:6) And so Korach logically maintains that the best place for all the Hebrews to carry out their priestly function as Divine agents is where they are - in the desert!

The desert experience provided a magnificent opportunity for all Israelites to devote themselves to Divine service, and to the study of Torah without distractions. No-one had private land to till, everyone received their portion of manna delivered to the door and their shelter in the desert booths or - even better - the clouds of glory which protected them. There was even a Divinely sent cloud by day and pillar of fire by

night to direct their travels. They were living in a perennial Kollel, with all their needs taken care of. What could be better than the Almighty Himself as the Kollel Dean, providing for every necessity and making every travel decision? Why leave a "sandy tower" for the challenges of war, politics, and economic disparities which plague every nation-state?

So why is Korach reviled and punished? I believe that it is because he didn't understand the function and purpose of a Jewish State. G-d doesn't only desire an exalted, holy nation that lives in sacred, sandy isolation. G-d chose Abraham to become a blessing for the world (Gen. 12:3) and revealed His law to us so that we teach it to all of humanity as "a light unto the nations". The true function of a Kohen is to teach, and the Kingdom of Kohanim exists to teach the world (Ex 19:6, Seforno). But we can only teach others if we demonstrate that we can solve our own national, existential and ethical problems ourselves, by means of the divinely bestowed Torah.

G-d did not choose us to warm ourselves alone with a fur coat, (a zaddik in peltz); rather, he chose us to light a fire which will bring the warmth of peace and security to all of humanity. This is to be done from a land where we can imbue every aspect of our agricultural, industrial, sociological, and political lives with the compassionate righteousness and moral justice of His Torah. We dare not stay in the desert; we must go up to Israel, become a nation-state, and join history!

And this is the egregious error of Datan and Aviram. Perhaps they, too, were "religious" Hebrews who felt that the best way to influence the world would be to live in Thebes, Cairo or New York and teach from there; hence their desire to return to Egypt. However, you cannot truly influence a nation unless you are in charge of its government setting the foundations and limits of its societal structures. Otherwise, you become influenced and compromised by that nation which "allows" you in, and "suffers" your presence.

This is the profound lesson we must learn from Joseph, Grand Vizier of Egypt. He rises to unique, perhaps unprecedented, greatness. He even succeeds in teaching Pharaoh about Elokim, Creator of heaven and earth (Gen 41:38). But when he must discharge the economic policies of Egypt, he enslaves all of the Egyptians making the Egyptian monarch a totalitarian despot who "owns" all of his Egyptian subjects (Gen 47:13-27). In his service to another nation and its ruler, Joseph was forced to compromise the cardinal

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

message of creation: that every human being, created in G-d's image, must be free and inviolate. Such uniquely Jewish lessons can only be expressed from our own homeland, as a nation-state performing as a significant actor on the stage of nations. ©2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

When we read the story of Korach, our attention tends to be focused on the rebels. We don't give as much reflection as we might to the response of Moses. Was it right? Was it wrong?

It's a complex story. As Ramban explains, it is no accident that the Korach rebellion happened in the aftermath of the story of the spies. So long as the people expected to enter the Promised Land, they stood to lose more than gain by challenging Moses' leadership. He had successfully negotiated all obstacles in the past. He was their best hope. But as a result of the spies, that whole generation was condemned to die in the wilderness. Now they had nothing to lose. When people have nothing to lose, rebellions happen.

Next, the rebels themselves. It's clear from the narrative that they were not a uniform or unified group. Malbim explains that there were three different groups, each with their own grievance and agenda.

First was Korach himself. Moses was the child of Kehat's eldest son, Amram. As the child of Kehat's second son, Yitzhar, Korach felt entitled to the second leadership role, that of high priest.

Second were Datan and Aviram, who felt that they were entitled to leadership positions as descendants of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn.

Third were the 250 others, described by the Torah as "princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown." Either they felt that they had earned the right to be leaders on meritocratic grounds, or Ibn Ezra's suggestion—they were firstborn who resented the fact that the role of ministering to G-d was taken from the firstborn and given to the Levites after the sin of the golden calf.

A coalition of the differently discontented: that is how rebellions tend to start.

What was Moses' reaction? His first response is to propose a simple, decisive test: Let everyone bring

an offering of incense and let G-d decide whose to accept. But the derisive, insolent response of Datan and Aviram seems to unnerve him. He turns to G-d and says: "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them." (Num. 16:15)

But they had not said that he had. That is the first discordant note.

G-d then threatens to punish the whole congregation. Moses and Aaron intercede on their behalf. G-d tells Moses to separate the community from the rebels so that they will not be caught up in the punishment, which Moses does. But he then does something unprecedented. He says:

"This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." (Num. 16:28-30)

This is the only time Moses asked G-d to punish someone, and the only time he challenged Him to perform a miracle. G-d does as Moses asks.

Naturally we expect that this will end the rebellion: G-d had sent an unmistakable sign that Moses was right, the rebels wrong. But it doesn't. Far from ending the rebellion, it made it worse: "The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the Lord's people,' they said." (Num. 16:41)

The people gather around Moses and Aaron as if about to attack them. G-d starts smiting the people with a plague. Moses tells Aaron to make atonement, and eventually the plague stops. But some 14,700 people have died. Not until a quite different demonstration takes place—Moses takes twelve rods representing the twelve tribes, and Aaron's buds and blossoms and bears fruit—does the rebellion finally end.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Moses' intervention, challenging G-d to make the earth swallow his opponents, was a tragic mistake. If so, what kind of mistake was it?

The Harvard leadership expert, Ronald Heifetz, makes the point that it is essential for a leader to distinguish between role and self. A role is a position we hold. The self is who we are. Leadership is a role. It is not an identity. It is not who we are. Therefore a leader should never take an attack on his leadership personally: "It's a common ploy to personalise the debate over issues as a strategy for taking you out of action... You want to respond when you are attacked... You want to leap into the fray when you are mischaracterised... When people attack you personally,

the reflexive reaction is to take it personally... But being criticised by people you care about is almost always a part of exercising leadership... When you take personal attacks personally, you unwittingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of action-you make yourself the issue." (Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, pp. 130, 190-191.)

Moses twice takes the rebellion personally. First, he defends himself to G-d after being insulted by Datan and Aviram. Second, he asks G-d miraculously and decisively to show that he-Moses-is G-d's chosen leader. But Moses was not the issue. He had already taken the right course of action in proposing the test of the incense offering. That would have resolved the question. As for the underlying reason that the rebellion was possible at all-the fact that the people were devastated by the knowledge that they would not live to enter the Promised Land-there was nothing Moses could do.

Moses allowed himself to be provoked by Korach's claim, "Why do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly" and by Datan and Aviram's offensive remark, "And now you want to lord it over us!" These were deeply personal attacks, but by taking them as such, Moses allowed his opponents to define the terms of engagement. As a result, the conflict was intensified instead of being defused.

It is hard not to see this as the first sign of the failing that would eventually cost Moses his chance of leading the people into the land. When, almost forty years later, he says to the people who complain about the lack of drink, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10) he shows the same tendency to personalise the issue ("Must we bring you water"-but it never was about "we" but about G-d).

The Torah is devastatingly honest about Moses, as it is about all its heroes. Humans are only human. Even the greatest makes mistakes. In the case of Moses, his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. His anger at injustice singled him out as a leader in the first place. But he allowed himself to be provoked to anger by the people he led, and it was this, according to Maimonides (Eight Chapters, ch. 4), that eventually caused him to forfeit his chance of entering the land of Israel.

Heifetz writes: "Receiving anger... is a sacred task... Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change." (Ibid. 142, 146.)

After the episode of the spies, Moses faced an almost impossible task. How do you lead a people when they know they will not reach their destination in their lifetime? In the end what stilled the rebellion was the sight of Aaron's rod, a piece of dry wood, coming to life again, bearing flowers and fruit. Perhaps this was not just about Aaron but about the Israelites themselves. Having thought of themselves as condemned to die in the desert, perhaps they now realised that they too had

born fruit-their children- and it would be they who completed the journey their parents had begun.

That, in the end, was their consolation.

Of all the challenges of leadership, not taking criticism personally and staying calm when the people you lead are angry with you, may be the hardest of all. That may be why the Torah says what it does about Moses, the greatest leader who ever lived. It is a way of warning future generations: if at times you are pained by people's anger, take comfort. So did Moses. But remember the price Moses paid, and stay calm.

Though it may seem otherwise, the anger you face has nothing to do with you as a person and everything to do with what you stand for and represent. Depersonalising attacks is the best way to deal with them. People get angry when leaders cannot magically make harsh reality disappear. Leaders in such circumstances are called on to accept that anger with grace. That truly is a sacred task. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

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

This is an essential ingredient in all spheres of leadership, especially in politics. Hearing-listening to the other is essential. The real challenge is not listening to those who agree with us, but listening to those who do not.

Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, a 16th century commentary offers a final idea. He notes that the text in Ethics states a controversy for Heaven will in the end-"sofah"-endure. In other words, when Hillel and Shammai disagreed they still wanted the halakhic

system to endure, hence, their controversy was for the sake of Heaven. This, unlike Korach, whose purpose in disagreeing with Moshe was to destroy the system of the priesthood.

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

If this distinction is blurred, if the government is declared illegitimate, the consequences are grievous. Citizens would then be able to take the law into their own hands and carve out their own conceptions of what they believe Jewish law demands. Let us pray that those in power and we ourselves realize the fine line between discourse that is destructive, selfish and fleeting and dissent for the sake of heaven, dissent that is constructive, productive, enduring and even holy.
© 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the entire congregation complained against Moshe and Aharon on the next day, saying, "you killed G-d's nation" (Bamidbar 17:6). Why were Moshe and Aharon blamed for the deaths of those who challenged their leadership, if the unnatural way in which they died proved it was G-d that had executed them? Rashbam, echoing the way most commentators understand this complaint, explains what the nation was thinking: "Regarding Dasan and Aviram, who were swallowed, we acknowledge that they sinned. However, the 250 men who died the way Nadav and Avihu died, it was you who killed them, by instructing them to burn incense." In other words, the test of the incense was not the appropriate way to prove that these 250 men were wrong, as even those whom you considered "Kohanim," Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu, died bringing incense. Rather than proving that these men were not meant to be "Kohanim," you just eliminated them by causing them to do something that would get them killed.

There are two elements to this complaint. For one thing, the original contention of the rebels that "the entire nation is holy" (16:3), and the Kohanim therefore shouldn't be the only ones allowed to perform the Temple service, had not been disproved. Secondly, Moshe and Aharon were being accused not only of taking too much power for themselves, but of abusing that power by eliminating their competition. The first aspect is dealt with through the subsequent test of the sticks (17:16-24), which was explicitly intended to

"remove the complaints that the Children of Israel had against Moshe and Aharon" (17:20). But what about the second aspect? How is the accusation that Moshe and Aharon caused the death of "G-d's nation" addressed? If the point of the "incense-test" was to prove that Aharon was the rightful Kohain Gadol, and/or that the first born weren't qualified to serve in the Mishkan, and the "stick-test" was still needed to prove this, were Moshe and Aharon really responsible for unnecessarily causing the death of these 250 men? If not, why not? And how do we see this in the response to this accusation?

Several Acharonim (later commentaries) point out some discrepancies in the way the "incense-test" is described (see Nesivos/Nachalas Yaakov, Netziv and Maharil Diskin). When first introduced (16:6-7), Aharon is not mentioned, and the instructions include adding fire to the fire-pan. After unsuccessfully attempting to reconcile with the rebels (16:8-14), Moshe repeats his instructions for the test (16:16-17), but this time Aharon is included (with his name mentioned twice), and there is no mention of adding fire to the fire-pans. When the test is actually undertaken (16:18), fire is added, but rather than Aharon being with the 250 men, he is separate, next to Moshe, indicating that just as Moshe didn't partake in this test, neither did Aharon. And, despite having added their own fire, a divine fire "goes out" and devours the 250 men (16:35), with no mention of Aharon having brought incense and being spared.

In order to explain these nuances, these Acharonim suggest that Moshe tried to change the way the test would be conducted, but the 250 men insisted that the original configuration be used. At first, Moshe responded to their rebellion by posing a challenge to them. Bringing incense is an extremely dangerous activity, as evidenced by the deaths of Nadav and Avihu (see Rashi on 16:6). Moshe tried to dissuade these dissenters from continuing their rebellion by challenging them to a test, a test he thought they would be afraid to take. The conditions for the test were chosen purposely to exactly match what Nadav and Avihu had done. In both cases they "took fire-pans," "put fire in them," and "placed incense upon them," in that specific order, using the same verbs/nouns in the same combinations (Vayikra 10:1, Bamidbar 16:6-7 and 16:18). Nadav and Avihu died because they tried getting too close to G-d (Vayikra 16:1)--closer than their position called for--and Moshe warned the rebels that rather than trying to get that close to G-d, G-d will bring the appropriate person that close to Him (Bamidbar 16:5; notice how Moshe repeats that G-d is the one Who brings close, not the other way around), by commanding them what to do (see Vayikra 10:1, where Nadav and Avihu doing something that wasn't commanded is emphasized). We can't choose how to get close to G-d, G-d tells us how to get close to Him--through his commandments. These guidelines came through Moshe, the very premise Korach and his followers were disputing. Moshe tried to

dissuade them by making them choose between challenging his teachings in a way that risked death (if they were wrong) or backing off, figuring (or at least hoping) that they would choose the latter. His intent was never to eliminate those who challenged him, but to get them to back down.

When this didn't happen (perhaps because Korach and his followers attributed the deaths of Nadav and Avihu to their being Kohanim to the exclusion of others, as some Rishonim suggest), Moshe tried to change the test so that they wouldn't be killed. Instead of offering burning incense, he proposed a challenge similar to the one posed by Eliyahu on Mt. Carmel. Each person would bring a fire-pan with incense, without any fire, and G-d would send a fire to consume the incense of whomever He chose. This way, no one would be bringing incense if they weren't supposed to, and G-d could indicate who was "chosen," whether it was one person or many people. Whereas there was no reason for Aharon to take part in the first type of test (as he offered incense every morning without being harmed), Aharon would need to have his own fire-pan in order to prove that he was chosen. Korach and his followers rejected this change-possibly because they were more willing to risk death than risk having to deal with being proven wrong, possibly because they feared that if there was a choice between people Aharon would win (whereas if each person was tested independently they could call qualify), possibly because they thought that Moshe had changed the test because he knew they would pass-and therefore added fire to their fire-pans rather than waiting to see if G-d would send a fire, and to whom. (Obviously, Aharon wasn't going to add fire against Moshe's wishes, and didn't need to prove that he was worthy of offering incense.) The bottom line, though, is that Moshe never wanted them to accept the challenge of this dangerous test, and tried to prevent it from ever happening.

It is unclear whether the rest of the nation knew about Moshe's attempt to change the nature of the test and only blamed him (and Aharon) for having suggested the riskier test to start with, or if they thought that Moshe really wanted the dangerous test the whole time. We also don't know if any of the onlookers complained about the nature of the test beforehand. All we know is that they complained about it afterwards, after seeing what happened. It is quite possible that what the nation was seeking most was clarity. They weren't convinced that Korach and his followers were right, but weren't sure that their arguments had no value either. It wasn't until after the disastrous consequences of the tests that the nation realized that they still didn't have full closure. They were willing to let others put their lives on the line to see if Korach was right, but were unhappy because the failed test didn't prove he was wrong.

After the nation complained, accusing Moshe and Aharon of "killing the nation of G-d," G-d sent a

plague (17:9-15). Aharon was able to stop the plague (after 14,700 people died) by "taking a fire-pan, putting a fire on it, and placing incense" (17:11), the same procedure that led to the deaths of the 250 leaders. Although Aharon had been offering incense everyday, it was always part of the daily required offerings (see Sefornu on 17:6). There were those whose complaint was that the "incense-test" was inappropriate because no one, not even Aharon, could bring incense if it was not part of the required offerings. They weren't bothered by the 250 deaths as much as that those deaths were unnecessary. When they saw Aharon also bring incense that was not part of the required offerings (see Ibn Ezra on 17:11) without being harmed (instead, it helped prevent others from dying and healed those who became sick, see Sefornu on 17:13 and 17:15), they realized that it had been a valid test. Others weren't sure that Aharon should be the Kohain Gadol or that the Tribe of Levi should have replaced the first-born. Although the "incense-test" proved that Aharon was chosen to be the Kohain Gadol, it only proved that the 250 leaders (who were all first-born, see Ramban at the end of 16:1) weren't worthy of being Kohanim; it didn't prove that they should be replaced by Levi'im (see Ramban at the end of 17:6). Since this deadly test didn't resolve every issue, they complained about it being employed at all; once the Levi/first-born issue was resolved through the "stick-test" and all the issues had closure, they no longer complained about the "incense-test" that had resolved the question about Aharon's status.

Why did Moshe suggest the dangerous "incense-test"? So that Korach and his followers would realize the gravity and consequences of their accusations, and back down. Why didn't they back down? Because they were willing to risk their lives to try proving that they were right and Moshe was wrong. Why did the nation complain about the "incense-test" afterwards? Because it hadn't brought closure to Korach's objections. Once they were all dealt with, though, they no longer took issue with Moshe posing the "incense-test," or with Aharon going along with it.

© 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The effects of personal ambition upon a person's behavior and decisions should never be underestimated. Korach, like many demagogues before and after him, cloaks his personal ambitions in the mantle of populism and democracy. He proclaims against Moshe: "All of the congregation of Israel are holy people and therefore by what right do you allow yourself to lord over them?" Of course when he succeeds to topple Moshe then he will lord over them.

The whole history of humanity is littered with such populist revolutions that only bring in their wake

oppression and dictatorship, many times worse than the regime that they dispossessed. The French and Russian revolutions are only two examples of this bitter historical truth. The current "Arab spring" shows signs of turning into such a type of disaster as well.

In the Tanach we read of the revolution of Yeravam against Rechavam in the name of justice and democracy only to see it end up in tyranny, paganism and the division of the Jewish people into two warring kingdoms. It is an interesting point to note that the greatest tyrannies proclaim themselves with the most high sounding and complimentary names and descriptive adjectives.

In our world whenever you see a country that advertises itself as "The Peoples Republic" you can be certain that you are dealing with a tyrannical dictatorship. This is the only way to view Korach's sloganeering and good words. And the true tragedy is that Korach will convince himself and his followers of the rectitude of his cause and be blind to his own burning ambition which fuels this entire incident.

Altruism is a difficult commodity to find in this world. Because of this fact people should always attempt to look at themselves honestly and admit to themselves their true drives and motivations. Channeled and focused ambition directed to the advancement of legitimate causes is part of Jewish tradition. Uncontrolled ambition that can destroy others is certainly outside the pale of Torah behavior.

The necessary vision to create and innovate is always founded on personal ambition and hope. But the ambition to destroy others, to climb over bodies to reach the perceived top destroys all concerned. Hillel's famous statement: "If I am not for me then who will be for me and if I am only for me then of what value am I?" expresses this balance of necessary and destructive ambition clearly for us. It is reflected in the prohibitions against slandering others and causing others pain and anguish.

It is related that when the great Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (Chidushei HaRim), the founder of the Chasidic dynasty of Gur, was yet a young scholar he composed a commentary to a certain section of Shulchan Aruch. He received such approbation on his work that great rabbis told him that his commentary would eclipse the commentary of Shach (Rabbi Shabtai Cohen) to that very same section of Shulchan Aruch.

Rabbi Alter never published his commentary because he felt that Shach (already in Heaven in the World to Come) would feel slighted that his commentary would now be replaced. Such are the lengths necessary for one to go to in order to control ambition which even in cases of great scholars and people such as Korach can bring one to ruin. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more

information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

He must have been the epitome of a Jewish sage. His face must have glowed with a holy light. His beard must have been long and white, his eyes bright with wisdom. He commanded great respect among the people, both for his illustrious lineage and for his own righteousness. His name was Korach. He led a rebellion against Moses and was swallowed up by the earth. He is one of the most infamous men in Jewish history. How could such a thing happen? How could one of the leading Jewish sages of his generation stoop so low as to rebel against Moses?

The commentators explain that it all began quite innocently. Korach had a strong desire to be close to the Almighty, and he strove to achieve that goal through the study of Torah and the performance of the commandments. But then he saw that there was another avenue open to Moses and Aaron, an avenue that was closed to him. Moses and Aaron had the special privilege of serving the Almighty in the Mishkan, of entering the inner sanctums and treading on the most hallowed ground on the face of the earth. Korach was filled with a righteous envy. How he longed to serve the Almighty at the highest level possible. How yearned to be as close as possible to Him.

So what went wrong? After all, righteous envy (kinath sofrim) is a positive force that leads to excellence in spiritual achievements.

The commentators explain that true righteousness is selfless. If his motivations had been pure, he would have accepted the Almighty's decision to delegate Aaron as the high priest, and he would have derived closeness to the Almighty from this very acquiescence. But somewhere deep inside, other motivations also lurked. In some sinister corner of his heart, he begrudged Moses and Aaron their honors and prestige. Perhaps he didn't even admit it to himself, but his motives were not exclusively righteous. And in the end, they brought him down.

Listen closely to his revolutionary statement, and you can hear the jealousy clearly. "Why do you raise yourself above Hashem's people?" Korach declared. "Why do you lord over them?" If he were only concerned about his own spiritual accomplishments, why focus on Moses? Why should he care about what Moses did or didn't have? This is jealousy in its pure form, concerned that someone might have something better.

A certain village along a well-traveled route always had strangers staying for the Sabbath. The custom in the village was that householders would invite these strangers after the Friday night services in the synagogue. The president would be the first to choose

his guest, and afterwards, the householders would extend invitations to the others.

A poor traveler once passed through the village and spent the Sabbath there. Friday night, he stood at the back of the synagogue waiting for someone to invite him for the meals. The president was talking to the rabbi.

One of the householders walked up to the traveler, shook his hand and extended an invitation. The traveler accepted gratefully.

Just then, the president turned around and saw what had happened.

"Did you see that?" he said to the rabbi furiously. "How dare that fellow extend an invitation before me. Maybe I wanted him as my guest!"

"My good fellow," said the rabbi. "If you are really motivated by feelings of hospitality, then you should be happy for the traveler who now has a good place to stay. If you are upset, it must be that you were more concerned with your own pleasure than with the needs of the guest."

In our own lives, we constantly need to evaluate and reexamine our own good deeds. We must look closely into ourselves to discover if we are acting for the higher good or if we are seeking honors and acclaim for our spiritual accomplishments. And we must always remember that selflessness is the surest route to closeness with the Almighty. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Korach's uprising against Moshe. "And Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of K'has, the son of Levi.[16:1]" Why did the Torah spell out his lineage all the way up to the tribe of Levi but stop short of Yaakov?

Rashi writes that when Yaakov was blessing his sons before his death, he placed a personal plea into the blessing bestowed upon Levi. "In their assembly (referring to Levi's descendant, Korach and his cohorts) do not mention my name."

The Kli Yakar explains that a forefather's name mentioned in the lineage implies that the root of the descendant's actions can be found in that predecessor.

Korach was jealous of having been passed by for a position that he felt he deserved. Moshe had appointed Elitzafon the son of Uziel to be the Nasi {prince/leader} of K'has. Elitzafon's father, Uziel, was younger than Korach's father, Yitzhar. Korach therefore felt that the position of Nasi should have gone to him.

He persuaded two hundred and fifty men to rebel against the validity of all of Moshe's appointments, including Aharon's appointment as the Kohen.

With this we understand why Korach's father, Yitzhar was mentioned. The star of Korach's uprising was his claim to the Nasi position as the son of Yitzhar.

Korach's lineage also extended to Levi, as it was an aspect inherited from Levi that played a role in his jealous uprising. Levi was a co-conspirator with Shimon in their jealousy-prompted plan to harm Yosef. The lineage therefore extended to him.

Yaakov foresaw what Korach would do and was afraid that Korach's actions might be traced back to him. Originally the Divine Service was to be performed by the b'choros {first born males} but was later switched to the Kohanim. Yaakov was afraid that Korach's contesting Aharon's appointment to Kehunah was rooted back in his own seizure of the b'chorah {birthright of the first-born} from Esav. He prayed that he had purified his intentions to the point that personal gain had not played a role and Korach's actions were not attributed to him in any way. Hashem showed this to be the case by leaving Yaakov's name out of Korach's lineage.

This concept can also be used to explain another intriguing aspect of Korach's rebellion. Korach and his entire family were swallowed up by the earth-even the infants. Rashi [16:27] points out that from here we can see the awesome power of machlokes {strife}. The court system would only punish once a person entered manhood at the age of thirteen. Yet here, when the issue was machlokes, even young children perished.

But why, in fact, did these innocent children die?

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l compares this to a 'ben sorer umoreh'-a very wayward young boy-who, if he does certain very specific and horrific acts, is put to death by the court. The explanation given is that the Torah foresaw where such actions would lead him. It's therefore better for him to die as an unaccountable youth rather than to continue this lifestyle and ultimately die as a very accountable and guilty adult.

The same can be applied to Korach's young children. As only Hashem can foresee the true effects of a parent's ways on the children, Hashem saw it fit and beneficial for even the children to die at that early point in their lives.

This places a tremendous responsibility on us as (present or future) parents. It also allows a person to recognize and appreciate how one's parents impacted on him.

After my father, hk"m, passed away, his tefillin were misplaced. With two grandsons approaching the age of bar mitzvah, it was especially frustrating. All plans went ahead and I ordered a new pair of tefillin for my son.

When the tefillin were finally located, my brother and I spoke and the issue of whose son would use the tefillin came up. As close as we are, it was a bit awkward as it was really a toss up and we each wanted our son to have them.

During a short break in the conversation, my thoughts turned to what my father must be thinking

while observing this conversation. It became so clear to me how he had always done everything possible to avoid machlokes- especially between his children. How the last thing he'd ever want was that something of his would be the cause of any tension between two sons.

I quickly told my brother, "You are older, Dad a"h, already chipped in toward the tefillin that I already ordered, I think your son should use them."

Those who have merited a legacy must live up to it-those who haven't need to start one for their children. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's Haftorah takes place after Shmuel the Navi had anointed Shaul to be the first king of Israel. Shmuel, who was a descendent of Korach, exhorts the nation to follow the ways of Hashem. He criticizes them for wanting a king while at the same time, pointing out that everyone, including the king, is subject to Hashem's law.

The connection to this week's Parsha is the fact that Shmuel was a descendent of Korach. Whereas Korach expressed a right to interpret the Torah as he saw fit, Shmuel tells the people that the success of the king and the nation is totally dependent upon their adherence to the letter of the law. In the end, it was Korach's own grandson who founded our nations leadership upon the unquestioned teachings of Moshe Rabbeinu. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

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 p"pp, 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 S. Katz & torah.org

