

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**"Y**ou have gone too far! The whole community are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above G-d's congregation?" (Num. 16:3).

What exactly was wrong in what Korach and his motley band of fellow agitators said? We know that Korach was a demagogue, not a democrat. He wanted power for himself, not for the people. We know also that the protestors were disingenuous. Each had their own reasons to feel resentful toward Moses or Aaron or fate. Set these considerations aside for a moment and ask: was what they said, true or false?

They were surely right to say, "All the community are holy." That, after all, is what G-d asked the people to be: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are (in some sense) priests, and a nation all of whose citizens are holy.

(Some suggest that the mistake they made was to say, "all the congregation are holy" [kulam kedoshim], instead of "all the congregation is holy" [kula kedoshah]. The holiness of the congregation is collective rather than individual. Others say that they should have said, "is called on to be holy" rather than "is" holy. Holiness is a vocation, not a state.)

They were equally right to say, "G-d is with them." That was the point of the making of the Tabernacle: "have them make Me sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Exodus ends with the words: "So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels" (Ex. 40:38). The Divine presence was visibly with the people wherever they went.

What was wrong was their last remark: "Why then do you set yourselves above G-d's congregation?" This was not a small mistake. It was a fundamental one. Moses represents the birth of a new kind of

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Mazel tov!

leadership. That is what Korach and his followers did not understand. Many of us do not understand it still.

The most famous buildings in the ancient world were the Mesopotamian ziggurats and Egyptian pyramids. These were more than just buildings. They were statements in stone of a hierarchical social order. They were wide at the base and narrow at the top. At the top was the king or pharaoh -- at the point, so it was believed, where heaven and earth met. Beneath was a series of elites, and beneath them the labouring masses.

This was believed to be not just one way of organising a society but the only way. The very universe was organised on this principle, as was the rest of life. The sun ruled the heavens. The lion ruled the animal kingdom. The king ruled the nation. That is how it was in nature. That is how it must be. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled. (Aristotle, Politics, Book 1, 1254<sup>a</sup>21-24)

Judaism is a protest against this kind of hierarchy. Every human being, not just the king, is in the image and likeness of G-d. Therefore no one is entitled to rule over any other without their assent. There is still a need for leadership, because without a conductor an orchestra would lapse into discord. Without a captain a team might have brilliant players and yet not be a team. Without generals an army would be a mob. Without government, a nation would lapse into anarchy. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

In a social order in which everyone has equal dignity in the eyes of heaven, a leader does not stand above the people. He serves the people, and he serves G-d. The great symbol of biblical Israel, the menorah, is an inverted pyramid or ziggurat, broad at the top, narrow at the base. The greatest leader is therefore the most humble. "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

The name to this is servant leadership, and its origin is in the Torah. (The well-known text on this theme is Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, New York, Paulist Press, 1977. Greenleaf does not, however, locate this idea in Torah. Hence it is important to see that it was born here, with Moses.) The highest accolade given to Moses is that he was "the

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servant of the Lord" (Deut. 34:5). Moses is given this title eighteen times in Tanakh as a whole. Only one other leader merits the same description: Joshua, who is described this way twice.

No less fascinating is the fact that only one person in the Torah is commanded to be humble, namely the king: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his G-d and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites..." (Deut. 17:18-20)

This is how Maimonides describes the proper conduct of a king: "Just as the Torah has granted the him great honour and obligated everyone to revere him, so too it has commanded him to be lowly and empty at heart, as it says: 'My heart is a void within me' (Psalm 109:22). Nor should he treat Israel with overbearing haughtiness, as it says, 'he should not consider himself better than his fellows' (Deut. 17:20).

"He should be gracious and merciful to the small and the great, involving himself in their good and welfare. He should protect the honor of even the humblest of people.

"When he speaks to the people as a community, he should speak gently, as in 'Listen my brothers and my people...' (King David's words in I Chronicles 28:2). Similarly, I Kings 12:7 states, 'If today you will be a servant to these people...'

"He should always conduct himself with great humility. There is none greater than Moses, our teacher. Yet, he said: 'What are we? Your complaints are not against us' (Exodus 16:8). He should bear the nation's difficulties, burdens, complaints and anger as a nurse carries an infant." (Hilkhot Melakhim 2:6)

The same applies to all positions of leadership. Maimonides lists among those who have no share in the world to come, someone who "imposes a rule of fear on the community, not for the sake of Heaven." Such a person "rules over a community by force, so that people are greatly afraid and terrified of him," doing so "for his own glory and personal interests." Maimonides adds to this last phrase: "like heathen

kings." (Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:13) The polemical intent is clear. It is not that no one behaves this way. It is that this is not a Jewish way to behave.

When Rabban Gamliel acted in what his colleagues saw as a high-handed manner, he was deposed as Nasi, head of the community, until he acknowledged his fault and apologized. (Berakhot 27b) Rabban Gamliel learned the lesson. He later said to two people who declined his offer to accept positions of leadership: 'Do you think I am giving you a position of honour [serarah]? I am giving you the chance to serve [avdut].' (Horayot 10a-b) As Martin Luther King once said "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve."

C. S. Lewis rightly defined humility not as thinking less of yourself but as thinking of yourself less. The great leaders respect others. They honour them, lift them, inspire them to reach heights they might never have done otherwise. They are motivated by ideals, not by personal ambition. They do not succumb to the arrogance of power.

Sometimes the worst mistakes we make are when we project our feelings onto others. Korach was an ambitious man, so he saw Moses and Aaron as two people driven by ambition, "setting themselves above G-d's congregation." He did not understand that in Judaism to lead is to serve. Those who serve do not lift themselves high. They lift other people high. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"**W**hat's in a name?", wryly asked the great English playwright William Shakespeare, denying any connection between the appellation and the essence. By contrast, "one's name defines one's persona" (K'shmo ken hu - as is his name, so is he), declared the Talmudic Sages, insisting that externals - and most certainly the term to which one is expected to answer and by which one is identified to the outside world - must influence one's internal state of being.

The biblical names certainly contained profound symbolic significance, with Moshe meaning "he takes out," or "he liberates," and Yehoshua - one scout in the minority of two who was in favor of conquering Israel - meaning "G-d will save." From this perspective, it is productive to explore the meaning of the name Korach, an uncommon name.

Moreover, a great deal seems to be made of the name Korach, both in the more esoteric Kabbalistic interpretations as well as in the more accessible midrashic commentaries. Rabbi Isaac Luria (known as the Holy Lion, who taught a path-breaking commentary to the sacred Zohar in 16th century Safed) cited the verse from the Psalms (92:13), "The righteous blossom as the palm tree" ("zadik katamar yifrah"), noting that

the last letter of these three words spell the name KRH (Korach) and insisting that the Biblical tamar (palm tree) is the antithesis - and repair (tikkun) - of Korach.

What is the significance of such last-letter acronym word-play on the name Korach? No less strange is the midrashic name-play in its interpretation of the ambiguous Biblical phrase *lo titgodedu v'lvo tasimu korhah* (Deut. 14:1), taking the words to mean either "you shall not scratch (your skin) and make yourself bald" (in excessive mourning over the dead), or alternatively "you shall not create divisiveness or make an argument (which is not for the sake of heaven but rather for egoistic motivations) as did Korach." What does the name Korach actually mean and what does it symbolize?

The Hebrew word *karah* means bald; there is a charming midrash about the frustrations of a man who had two wives, one older and one younger, with the older removing the black hairs from his head and the younger removing the white hairs, so that he was left completely bald (*kareah*) from this one and from that one - as well as ice (in modern Hebrew, a *karhon* is an ice pop). Both words have one idea in common: neither provides fertile soil for growth and development; hair does not grow on a bald head, and grass or flowers do not emanate from ground covered with ice (witness the devastation of plant life during the Ice-Age).

Rabbi Isaac Luria joined Korach to Tamar because the biblical heroine had been twice married without her womb bearing fruit; in order for her to merit progeny in Israel and to develop Jewish destiny, she had to take matters in her own hands and become impregnated (fertilized, seeded) by Judah. As in every case of *yibum*, individuals must sacrifice themselves to a certain degree in order to be linked to Jewish eternity. The midrash understands that an argument which is based on egoistic motivations will not allow for compromise and will never bear the fruit of resolution; such a dispute can only lead to devastation and destruction (*karhah*).

An analysis of Korach's argument will quickly demonstrate the symbolic significance of his name. At first glance he seems to be a populist, arguing in favor of the exalted qualities of every single Israelite who stood at Sinai: "The entire congregation are all holy and G-d is in their midst; why do you (Moses and Aaron) lift yourselves up above the community of G-d?" (Num. 16:3). But when we remember that the Almighty never describes the Israelites as a holy nation as they are, by right and by privilege without striving and even suffering to achieve holiness, we begin to realize that Korach is more demagogue than democrat, more flatterer than educator. "You shall become holy," commands and demands our Torah (Lev.19:2); Moses and Aaron worked for and achieved their holiness not by right but by righteousness! Holiness is the result of a process, a growth, a development; it is not a gift bestowed

automatically.

Indeed, the antithesis of the hairless bald head and the grass-less icy-ground is the palm tree, the Tamar, which - with proper nurture - will produce dates; so, teaches the Psalmist, will the righteous individual develop, just as the palm tree flourishes as a result of painstaking care and development - Korach is impatient; he wishes to usurp Aaron's (and perhaps Moses') place - without the concomitant effort which must be expended before one can be worthy of leadership. He is punished by being swallowed up by the earth - perhaps in order to teach him that before a seed develops into a fruit-bearing tree, it must first rot beneath the ground as a necessary part of the process of growth and fructification and our portion vindicates Aaron as the true leader chosen by the Divine; the staff of Aaron, the very antithesis of arid Korach, brings forth flowers, develops blossoms, and bears almonds. True leadership can only emerge after a long and arduous process of selfless and sustained nurture and hard work. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

In the entire biblical narrative of the sojourn of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, the tribe of Levi is not mentioned as being a participant in any of the rebellions and mutinies of the Jewish people against G-d and Moshe. The tribe of Levi stood firm in its faith and loyalty during the disaster of the Golden Calf and rallied to the side of Moshe to stem that tide of idolatry.

In the complaints mounted against Moshe and G-d about water and food, the tribe of Levi is not to be found. The tribe of Levi did not participate in the mission of the spies and explorers of the Land of Israel and there is opinion that it was not included in the decree that that generation would die in the desert and never see the Land of Israel. Yet this seemingly impeccable record is tarnished by the events described in this week's parsha.

Here, apparently, the tribe of Levi, through Korach and his supporters, are the leaders of a very serious rebellion against the authority of Moshe. Moshe himself is a Levite and when he criticizes the behavior of the tribe of Levi - "is it not enough for you to be the chosen servants of the Lord in your Levite status that you must insist that you will also be the priestly class of Israel?!" he certainly does so with heavy heart and great bitterness. In effect he is demanding to know what happened to turn the holy tribe of Levi into a rebellious group whose punishment would be their being swallowed up by the earth.

One of my favorite truisms in life is that one is never to underestimate the power of ego. The Great War of 1914-18 was in a great measure caused and driven by the egotistical whims of some of the main monarchs of Europe who were then in power. The

Talmud records for us that the evil but potentially great King of Israel, Yeravam ben Nvat, was offered by G-d, so to speak, to stroll in Paradise alongside King David and G-d Himself, again, so to speak.

The Talmud tells us that Yeravam refused the offer because King David would have preference of place over him on that walk in Heaven. The message and moral that the Talmud means to convey with this story is how dangerous and tragic an inflated ego can be to one's self and, if one is in a position of leadership and authority it, may affect others as well.

Korach and the tribe of Levi fall victim to their inflated egos. Their sense of self is now far from reality and responsibility. One cannot be without ego and self-pride. Yet these attributes must be tempered by perspective, logic and a sense of loyalty and obedience to the word of G-d. That, in my opinion, is the basic lesson of this week's parsha.

Moshe's overriding sense of modesty diminishes the drive of his own ego and he is able to say "would that all of G-d's congregation could join me as prophets." Korach, consumed by his unjustly inflated ego, destroys himself and many others in his quest for positions that do not belong to him nor is he worthy of having. ©2014 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 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. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he story of Korach's rebellion contains echoes of the golden calf narrative. Each involves insurrection. In the golden calf episode, the Jews aspire to replace Moshe (Moses). (Exodus 32:1) In the Korach story, Aharon's (Aaron) priesthood is also challenged. (Numbers 16:10)

The relationship between these two episodes is pointed out by the Ibn Ezra. Following the golden calf incident, the privilege to lead the temple service was removed from the firstborn. Korach, being a firstborn himself (Exodus 6:21), along with two hundred fifty other firstborn, revolts after the first sacrificial service in the Temple, when Korach most deeply feels his exclusion.

Interestingly, in both incidents, Aharon and Moshe react differently. Aharon is the peacemaker who attempts to calmly bring relief to an explosive situation.

Thus, in the golden calf event, Aharon instructs the people to bring gold from which he fashions the golden calf. (Exodus 32:2- 4) Rather than confronting the Israelites, a tactic Aharon felt would fail, Aharon decides to bide for time, in the hope that Moshe would soon return. He declares, "A festival for the Lord tomorrow," (Exodus 32:5) predicting that by the morrow, the people would change their ways and worship G-d.

In the Korach story, Aharon plays a similar role. Placing incense upon his fire pan, he once again acts as a peacemaker, and stops the plague that killed thousands subsequent to the punishment of Korach. (Numbers 17:11-14) In fact, it is Aharon's staff that blossoms and sprouts, proving in the most powerful, yet peaceful, way, that G-d had given the tribe of Levi the role of ritual leadership. (Numbers 17:23)

Moshe, on the other hand is far more aggressive. Without a prior command from G-d, he shatters the tablets in reaction to the golden calf. (Exodus 32:19)

In the Korach episode, Moshe acts similarly. Without a word from G-d, Moshe declares that the earth would open up and swallow Korach and his cohorts. The earth does just that. (Numbers 16:30-32)

What emerges from these two episodes are two different ways to deal with communal crisis. Aharon's approach is one of calm, quiet diplomacy. Moshe's style is bold, strident, pointed and even militant.

Throughout history, Jews, when facing challenges, have debated which of these two philosophies - Aharon's or Moshe's - is more valid. These discussions are still very much alive, as we are faced daily with barrages on the safety of Jews in Israel and in other places in the world.

From my perspective, it would seem that since both approaches are found in the Torah, we learn that each has value. It can be argued that both of these tactics strengthen the other - both quiet diplomacy and public protest yield results. On the one hand, you need those on the inside, working within the organized system to effect change. On the other hand, it is public protest that is the fuel that allows quiet diplomacy to work. ©2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah shares with us a significant perspective about a Jewish government in Eretz Yisroel. The Jewish people had recently approached the prophet Shmuel requesting the appointment of a king. The prophet acquiesced in their request and transferred the mantle of leadership to the most worthy candidate in Israel, Shaul. Shmuel then proceeded to convey strong words of reprimand to the Jewish people for their request. He reviewed with them his personal service both as judge and prophet and challenged them to find any fault in his faithful service. After they attested to Shmuel's perfect record of leadership he reminded them of Hashem's constant favors securing them with perfect leadership at all times.

Shmuel then said "And now here is the king you requested; behold Hashem has given you a king. If you revere Hashem, serve Him and follow His voice without rebelling you and your king will merit the guidance of Hashem. And if you don't adhere..."(12:14). Malbim understands these passages to convey the following message. If the Jewish people follow closely the path of Torah, Hashem will, in effect, be their leader. But if they don't they will not merit His guidance and will ultimately be severely punished for their wrong doings.

The prophet continued and stated, "Is it not the harvest season today? I'll call upon Hashem and He will bring heavy rain. You will see and know the great offense you have committed by requesting a king for yourself."(12:17) Shmuel seems to have admonished the Jewish people merely for requesting a king. Why would a request of this nature be considered so wrong? After all, the Torah does allow for a monarch system and dedicates a full section in Parshas Shoftim to the regulations of a Jewish commonwealth? Malbim explains that at the appropriate moment the notion of a Jewish king is certainly acceptable. However, during the lifetime of Shmuel Hanavi a request of this nature was considered a rejection of both himself and the Torah he represented. Shmuel had faithfully served and judged his people with all the perfect standards of the

Torah. In Shmuel's eyes, therefore the Jewish people's request represented a rejection of the Torah's perfect judicial system. In addition it reflected a strong desire for the people to establish their own control over the land. Malbim deduces this intent from the marked words of their initial request. They asked, "Now bestow upon us a king to judge us like all the nations." (8:5) He explains that the Jewish people desired to establish their own judicial system whereby they could have total control over the development of their country. They yearned to be like all other nations whose control over their destiny was per se in their own hands. They no longer wished to subjugate themselves to the dictates of the Torah and be led by secret revelations of Hashem told to His prophets.

Malbim concludes that, in truth, timing was the key factor in this request. Had they waited until the passing of their faithful prophet and judge, Shmuel, their request would have been in line. With his passing a sincere need for direction and leadership would have arisen and the request for a king would have been forthcoming. However, while remaining under the devout leadership of Shmuel their request was sinful and completely unacceptable. It reflected a new direction for the Jewish people and a sincere interest to be released from the tight control of Hashem. Shmuel responded by asking Hashem to display fierce thunderstorms. It was customary during the summer months to spread the fruits of the land on the open fields to dry. During this process rain was certainly untimely and unfavorable. Although rain, in general is definitely a blessing, during certain moments it can be a sign of Hashem's rejection and displeasure. In fact, Chazal teach us that rain during the Sukkos festival is viewed as a sign of rejection. (see Tractate Sukkah 28b) Through this untimely rain and its reflection of rejection, Shmuel informed them that their untimely request for a king was likewise a true sign of rejection.

However Shmuel's response didn't end there. He continued in admonition, "And if you don't adhere to the voice of Hashem but rebel against Him the hand of Hashem will be upon you and your ancestors." Chazal explain this peculiar notion of Hashem's plaguing our ancestors. They profoundly state, "Through the sin of the living the deceased are desecrated." (Yevomos 63b) This means that the sinfulness of an inappropriate government in Eretz Yisroel is so severe that it provokes the desecration of the deceased. Mahral (Chidushei Agados ad loc.) enlightens us about the association of the desecration of the deceased and an inappropriate government in Eretz Yisroel. He explains that from the Torah perspective the desecration of the deceased is regarded as total disorder. After one departs from this world he is entitled to a peaceful and undisturbed rest and the desecration of his remains violates his basic human rights. In this same vein the most basic and appropriate setting for government in

Israel is to be governed by the principles of Hashem. After all shouldn't Hashem's will be the law of His land!? It follows that any violation of this and, more specifically, control of the land divorced from His principles is nothing other than total disorder. We now realize that desecration of the deceased, their total disorder is but a natural consequence of a secular, non-religious government in Israel, our total disorder.

At present, the governmental structure in Israel displays some level of respect for the principles of Torah. Let it be the will of Hashem that they be fully recognized in His land and that all disorders amongst the deceased and the living be corrected and perfected speedily in our days. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

#### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

### Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "And Korach, the son of Izhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took..." (Num. 16:1).

Why does the Torah give us Korach's genealogy here?

Rashi explains that the key reason for Korach's rebellion against Moshe was his envy of a relative who received honor which Korach believed should have belonged to him.

Envy is destructive. It prevents a person from enjoying his own blessings. When you focus on the success of another person and feel pain because of it, you are likely to do things that are highly counterproductive. Envy is one of the three things that totally destroy a person (Pirke Avos 4:28). The downfall of Korach was because of this trait. Not only did he not get what he wanted, but he lost everything he already possessed.

How does one overcome envy? The key is to focus on what you have and on what you can accomplish in this world. Envy arises when a person looks at others and compares himself to them. The ultimate that anyone can have in this world is happiness. When you master this trait by focusing on those things conducive to happiness, you need never to envy another person. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

#### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

### Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Korach introduces us to the complaints that Korach had against Moshe, and the punishment that he and his followers received for what they tried to do. Among the many protests of Korach was that the Jews in the desert shouldn't have to wear Tzitzit (fringed clothing) or put up Mezuzot (Scriptural writings for doorposts), since the purpose of those two commandments is to make us Holier, and they were holy enough already. What seems odd is that the way Korach and his followers were punished was

by being swallowed into the ground with all that they owned. How did the punishment fit the crime? And if the arguments were valid, what was the crime?

As Rav Dessler explains, the true test of anyone's character is in the way they do the 'little things'. It's easier to go to shul (Synagogue) on Yom Kippur than it is to pray with concentration when no one else will know you didn't, and when you can easily rationalize that you'll concentrate more next time. So to test our level of commitment, we look at the things we could ignore, and see how honest we are about those things. The same rule could apply to what Korach was claiming: Although they were relatively minor commandments he was protesting (because they're both conditional), it was the fact that he felt that he could rationalize not doing them that got him in trouble. That level of arrogance had to be punished by putting Korach in his place, literally!

The ground is the lowest place you can be, where you not only have to look up at people, but you actually help others stay above you by letting them walk on you! The message from this Parsha is to make sure never to be so arrogant that we ignore even the little things in our relationships, in our lives, and especially in the Torah! © 2006 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd Dasan and Aviram went out standing in front of their tents, [along with] their wives, children and infants" (Bamidbar 17:27). In what may be the first attempt at using human shields, these sinners not only didn't repent, but had their families stand right where Moshe had just warned the rest of the nation to move away from, "lest they be swept up in [the retribution for] their sins" (16:26). Included in those who were standing by their tents, and therefore swallowed by the giant sinkhole created specifically to punish Korach and his cohorts (16:32), were infants, a category expressly stated independent of the other children, leading Chazal (Tanchuma 3/6, Bamidbar Rabbah 18:4) to say that even those who were just born that very same day were swallowed alive. Which leads to the question of how innocent children could be included in the punishment of others. After all, they didn't defy Moshe, or deny the authority or authenticity of the Torah he taught. How could children too young to have sinned suffer the same consequences as adult sinners? (Or suffer at all, for that matter.)

Rashi seems to address this issue (at least pertaining to this instance), when he paraphrases the above-referenced Midrash: "Come and see how harsh division/dispute is, for human courts do not punish (a sinner) until he [is 13], and the heavenly court [does not punish] until (a sinner) is 20, and here even those who were still nursing were destroyed." Although this is

certainly an acknowledgement of the issue, and the lesson being taught (about the severity of dispute) is clear, the question still remains. These infants were not part of the dispute; how could they be included in the punishment?

Some commentators on Rashi (e.g. Nachlas Yaakov and Maskil L'Dovid) suggest that being part of a dispute permeates a person so deeply that even the children were affected by it (see Gur Aryeh), and had to be eliminated along with the other disputants. A comparison is even made to the "ben sorer u'moreh," the rebellious son who is put to death so that he dies without sin rather than allowing him to sin and be punished for it. However, the "ben sorer u'moreh" was not an infant; can newborn infants be so affected by a dispute their parents are involved in that their lives are not worth being spared? Besides, it only pushes the question back one step; what did the souls of these infants do wrong to be born into families involved in a dispute, which in turn causes them to be included in the punishment?

Rabbeinu Bachye (17:29), in order to explain how innocent children could have been swallowed by the earth due to the sin of others, as well as why Moshe didn't pray for these sinners when he had prayed for other sinners (see Sh'mos 32:11 and 32:31-32, Bamidbar 11:2 and 14:13-19), tells us that those involved with Korach's rebellion were the reincarnated souls of those who tried to build the Tower of Babel (B'reishis 11:3-4), who were also the reincarnated souls of the wicked men of Sodom. The men who joined Korach were "anshei shem," men who were well-known (Bamidbar 16:2), and the purpose of building the Tower was to "become well-known" ("v'na'aseh lanu shem"). Similarly, the men of Sodom who surrounded Lot's house were blinded so that they couldn't break down his door (B'reishis 19:11), and Dasan and Aviram told Moshe that even if he blinded them they wouldn't come meet with him (Bamidbar 16:14). Rabbeinu Bachye says that the Torah used these literary devices (and others) in order to indicate that this was the third major sin these souls were involved in; although usually a soul will get it right by its third chance (referencing Koheles 4:12), in this case they didn't, so Moshe knew it was futile to pray for them. [Rashi (16:4) quotes Chazal, who gave a different reason why Moshe didn't daven for these sinners; for my thoughts on this approach, see <http://tinyurl.com/p9atne4>.]

Rabbeinu Bachye says that this answers his other question too, how these children can suffer if only their parents sinned, but I'm not sure how. Since the infants were too small to have sinned with Korach, their souls only had two chances, not three! In his introduction to Sefer Iyov, the Ramban gives several reasons why seeing the righteous suffer does not contradict G-d being completely just. One of these reasons is that they could be the reincarnated souls of

people who weren't completely righteous, but didn't receive the punishment for what they had done in their previous life while they lived it. Therefore, their souls are sent back again, during which time they receive the punishment for what they had done in the previous life, even if nothing they did in their current life warrants such a punishment. It is therefore possible that the souls of these infants were being punished for their participation in those previous sins, even if they couldn't be held accountable for this one. (If so, they should have to be given a third chance in still another lifetime.) Although this answers Rabbeinu Bachye's question while being consistent with his reincarnation angle (and Rabbeinu Bachye often quotes, at length, word for word, the Ramban's commentary on Chumash), he does not add this additional piece to the puzzle, making it difficult to say that this is what he meant.

The question of how children can suffer at all, let alone along with Korach's followers, shouldn't need a reincarnation background, or the severity of disputes, in order to be explained. As I have discussed on numerous occasions (e.g. <http://tinyurl.com/q2vpqs8>), not everyone is worthy of divine intervention. Children, who have not yet had a chance to create a strong enough connection to G-d to merit His protection in their own right, are therefore subject to the consequences of the actions of others. (This actually applies to most people, even adults, see S'fornu on Vayikra 13:47, but at least adults have the opportunity to create a strong enough connection with G-d to be protected by Him.) When G-d told Moshe that He was about to punish Korach and his followers, He told Moshe to have everyone else move away so that they wouldn't suffer the same consequences (Bamidbar 16:26); if the adults who weren't part of Korach's group had to move away in order not to be swallowed alive by the earth, how could we expect the children who stayed there not to be? Why would we expect that children, who do not merit divine protection in their own right, would be saved from a dangerous situation just because they're children?

### Parsha Puns!

**What's a MATTEH? If u feel upTITHE like u r  
KORACHin' up, don't get nuts. Just go with the  
FLOW WER u can & have an EARTH  
SHATTERING Shabbos!**



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When lamenting the destruction of Yerushalayim, the prophet lists some of the consequences, including that "her young ones were taken captive" (Eichah 1:5). The Nesivos (Palgay Mayim) says that children, who are innocent, being taken captive proves that G-d was no longer protecting Israel, as otherwise He wouldn't have let those without sin suffer. The Nesivos is referring to protection on a national level, as when we, as a nation, are deserving of His protection, individuals don't need to be worthy of it in their own right. In the desert, with G-d's presence residing in the Mishkan, we did have divine protection on a national level, as evidenced by the "clouds of glory" (see <http://tinyurl.com/ne7vfny>), so the children should have been protected too. The question of why they weren't would seem to be based on the fact that at this point in time the nation was being protected by G-d, so unless a punishment is purposely directed at a sinner (and children can't be considered sinners), they shouldn't have suffered.

Since the "starting point" for children (including infants) is that they are not protected (and could therefore experience suffering even without having sinned), and that in the desert they should have been protected because of the umbrella protection that the nation as a whole was experiencing, if there was a hole in that "umbrella," the national protection would not cover everyone. "Come and see how harsh dispute is, for human courts do not punish a sinner until he is 13, and heavenly court until he is 20, and here even those who were still nursing were destroyed." Not because these children were being held accountable for actions they had no control over, but because the dispute had created a "hole" in the divine national protection, with G-d not protecting those involved in the dispute. It was for this reason that the rest of the nation was warned to move away, as anyone nearby wouldn't be protected either. And since these children were there when the earth opened up beneath the sinners, they were swallowed up with them.

There is one more point to add. The Midrashim that Rashi paraphrased don't start with Rav B'rechya's statement about how severe disputes are. Rather, they first say that whoever assists in a dispute will have his memory destroyed. The implication is that he will lose his progeny, after which Rav B'rechya's adds that from here we see how severe disputes are, as even infants are destroyed. They are destroyed as part of the punishment of the parents, which operates even (or perhaps especially) when the nation is being divinely protected, since infants and children do not merit specific protection of their own. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

