

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

What was wrong with Korach and his fellow rebels? On the face of it, what they said was both true and principled. "You have gone too far," they said to Moses and Aaron. "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and G-d is with them. Why then are you setting yourselves above G-d's congregation?"

They had a point. G-d had summoned the people to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," (Ex. 19:6), that is, a kingdom every one of whose members was in some sense a priest, and a nation every one of whom was holy. Moses himself had said, "Would that all G-d's people were prophets, that He would place His spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29). These are radically egalitarian sentiments. Why then was there a hierarchy, with Moses as leader and Aaron as High Priest?

What was wrong was that even at the outset it was obvious that Korach was duplicitous. There was a clear disconnection between what he claimed to want and what he really sought. Korach did not seek a society in which everyone was the same, everyone a priest. He was not, as he sounded, a utopian anarchist, seeking to abolish hierarchy altogether. He was, instead, mounting a leadership challenge. As Moses' later words to him indicate, he wanted to be High Priest himself. He was Moses' and Aaron's cousin, son of Yitzhar, the brother of Moses' and Aaron's father Amram. He felt it unfair that both leadership positions had gone to a single family within the clan. He claimed to want equality. In fact what he wanted was power.

That was Korach the Levite. But what was happening was more complex than that. There were two other groups involved: the Reubenites, Dathan and Aviram, and "250 Israelites who were men of rank within the community, representatives at the assembly, and famous." They too had their grievances. The Reubenites were aggrieved that as descendants of Jacob's firstborn, they had no special leadership roles. According to Ibn Ezra, the 250 "men of rank" were upset that, after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn within each tribe to the single tribe of Levi.

This was an unholy alliance, and bound to fail, since their claims conflicted. If Korach achieved his

ambition of becoming High Priest, the Reubenites and "men of rank" would have been disappointed. Had the Reubenites won, Korach and the "men of rank" would have been disappointed. Had the "men of rank" achieved their ambition, Korach and the Reubenites would be left dissatisfied. The disordered, fragmented narrative sequence in this chapter is a case of style mirroring substance. This was a disordered, confused rebellion, whose protagonists were united only in their desire to overthrow the existing leadership.

None of this, however, unsettled Moses. What caused him to become angry was something else altogether: the words of Datan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert! And now you want to lord it over us! What is more: you have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you think that you can pull something over our eyes? We will definitely not come!" The monumental untruth of their claim -- Egypt, where the Israelites were slaves and cried out to G-d to be saved, was not "a land flowing with milk and honey" -- is what finally made Moses angry.

What is going on here? The sages defined it in one of their most famous statements: "Any dispute for the sake of heaven will have enduring value, but every dispute not for the sake of Heaven will not have enduring value. What is an example of a dispute for the sake of heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of one not for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company" (Mishnah Avot 5:21).

The rabbis did not conclude from the Korach rebellion that argument is wrong, that leaders are entitled to unquestioning obedience, that the supreme value in Judaism should be -- as it is in some faiths -- submission. To the contrary: argument is the lifeblood of Judaism, so long as it is rightly motivated and essentially constructive in its aims.

Judaism is a unique phenomenon: a civilization all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of argument. In Tanakh, the heroes of faith -- Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Job -- argue with G-d. Midrash is founded on the premise that there are "seventy faces" -- seventy legitimate interpretations -- of Torah. The Mishnah is largely constructed on the model of "Rabbi X says this, Rabbi Y says that." The Talmud, far from

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. 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 synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

resolving these arguments, usually deepens them considerably. Argument in Judaism is a holy activity, the ongoing internal dialogue of the Jewish people as it reflects on the terms of its destiny and the demands of its faith.

What then made the argument of Korach and his co-conspirators different from that of the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Rabbenu Yona offered a simple explanation. An argument for the sake of Heaven is one that is about truth. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is about power. The difference is immense. If I argue for the sake of truth, then if I win, I win. But if I lose, I also win, because being defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. I am enlarged. I learn something I did not know before.

In a contest for power, if I lose, I lose. But if I win, I also lose, because in diminishing my opponents I have diminished myself. Moses could not have had a more decisive vindication than the miracle for which he asked and was granted: that the ground open up and swallow his opponents. Yet not only did this not end the argument, it diminished the respect in which Moses was held: "The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the Lord's people,' they said." (Num. 17:41). That Moses needed to resort to force was itself a sign that he had been dragged down to the level of the rebels. That is what happens when power, not truth, is at stake.

One of the aftermaths of Marxism, persisting in such movements as postmodernism and post-colonialism, is the idea that there is no such thing as truth. There is only power. The prevailing "discourse" in a society represents, not the way things are, but the way the ruling power (the hegemon) wants things to be. All reality is "socially constructed" to advance the interests of one group or another. The result is a "hermeneutics of suspicion," in which we no longer listen to what anyone says; we merely ask, what interest are they trying to advance? Truth, they say, is merely the mask worn to disguise the pursuit of power. To overthrow a "colonial" power, you have to invent your own "discourse," your own "narrative," and it does not matter whether it is true or false. All that matters is that people believe it.

That is what is now happening in the campaign against Israel on campuses throughout the world, and in the BDS movement in particular. Like the Korach rebellion it brings together people who have nothing else in common. Some belong to the far left, a few to the far right, some are anti-globalists, while some are genuinely concerned with the plight of the Palestinians. Driving it all, however, are people who on theological and political grounds are opposed to the existence of Israel within any boundaries whatsoever, and are equally opposed to democracy, free speech, freedom of information, religious liberty, human rights and the sanctity of life. What they have in common is a refusal to give the supporters of Israel a fair hearing -- thus flouting the fundamental principle of justice, expressed in Roman law in the phrase *Aude alteram partem*, "Hear the other side."

The flagrant falsehoods it sometimes utters -- that Israel was not the birthplace of the Jewish people, that there never was a Temple in Jerusalem, that Israel is a "colonial" power, a foreign transplant alien to the Middle East -- rival the claims of Datan and Aviram that Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey and that Moses brought the people out solely in order to kill them in the desert. Why bother with truth when all that matters is power? Thus the spirit of Korach lives on.

All this is very sad indeed, since it is opposed to the fundamental principle of the university as a home for the collaborative search for truth. It also does little for the cause of peace in the Middle East, for the future of the Palestinians, or for freedom, democracy, religious liberty and human rights. There are real and substantive issues at stake, which need to be faced by both sides with honesty and courage. Nothing is achieved by sacrificing truth to the pursuit of power: the way of Korach through the ages. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Moses said to Korah: "Hear me, sons of Levi: Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Israel has set you apart [as Levites]... Must you also seek the priesthood?" (Num. 16:8-10) Last week's portion of Shelah, in which the desert Israelites refused to wage war in the conquest of the Promised Land, portrayed the great rebellion against G-d - whereas this week's portion of Korah documents two great rebellions against Moses, the first by Korah and the second by Dathan and Abiram. Let us begin with Korah, the apparent leader of the pack who (you might remember) was called by the Sage Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk "the holy grandfather," (in Yiddish, *die heiliger zeide*).

After all, his desire is not for material gain or political power; it is rather for greater religious piety, for the assumption of the mantle of the *kehuna* -

priesthood of Divine service. Next in the anti-Moses lineup are Dathan and Abiram, impudent upstarts who even refuse the opportunity of a personal meeting with Moses to reconcile their differences. "Is it not enough that you took us out from a land flowing with milk and honey [Egypt!] to have us die in the desert? Would you also lord it over us, yes, lord it over us?" (ibid. 12-13). The fact that they refer to Egypt as "a land flowing with milk and honey" demonstrates how very far they are from the vision of a Hebrew homeland, of Jerusalem as the city of world peace.

The one idea which unites all three rebels and their factions is their refusal to settle in the Promised Land of Israel. Dathan and Abiram hankered after the Egyptian "fleshpots." They were certain that if the Hebrews would only give up the clannish and old-fashioned customs and morality which they received from their ancestral forbears, then they would be accepted as brothers by the Egyptians and could assimilate into the wealthy and forward-looking Egyptian society.

Hence Dathan, Abiram and their cohorts were punished by being devoured by the earth, swallowed up by the very materialism which had overtaken their Abrahamic traditions and teachings (ibid. 33, Ibn Ezra ad loc).

Korah, on the other hand, was the "holy grandfather" who wished to remain close to G-d in the desert. He was the heir to Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who had brought a "strange fire which G-d had not commanded" (Lev. 10: 1). According to the Midrash, they were on an even higher spiritual elevation than Moses and Aaron, and so it was they who had been chosen by G-d to sanctify the Sanctuary when G-d sent fire from heaven to respond to the spontaneous fire which they had offered in religious ecstasy (Leviticus Raba 12:2 cited by Rashi, Lev. 10:3).

Korah, wanted to retain the rarefied and ethereal kollel atmosphere of the desert, where manna came down from heaven and where their travels were directed by G-d Himself.

Hence the Ibn Ezra maintains that Korah's end was similar to that of Nadab and Abihu, The "holy grandfather" was consumed by a "fire sent forth by the Lord which devoured the two hundred fifty men who offered the [fiery] incense" (Num. 16:35 and see Ibn Ezra to Num. 16:33). Korah, too, was against the conquest of Israel, but for spiritual rather than materialistic reasons: The holy grandfather did not wish to leave the close relationship to G-d enjoyed by the Hebrews in the desert. He was loath to dirty his hands and besmirch his soul by working the land and entering the world of political machinations necessary to develop a nation-state. And since the actions of the biblical personalities presage the deeds of their descendants, Korah's attitudes are extremely close to those of the haredim (ultra-Orthodox) today vis-a-vis the army and

Torah study.

Despite his worthy motivation, Korah was a sinner who did not heed G-d's command for the conquest of Israel. G-d willed us to engage with His world, to work and develop that world, to perfect it and to preserve it (Gen. 2:15). G-d elected Abraham as the patriarch of His covenantal and eternal nation so that His treasured people would be "blessing to all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3); and the reason that G-d chose Abraham was because "he was instructing his children and his household after him to observe the pathway of the Lord to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Gen. 18:19). If Israel is indeed to be a source of blessing to all the nations on earth, it is necessary for Israel to be a nation like all other nations, to be a mighty and successful nation.

Immediately before the Revelation at Sinai, we are reminded that the entire world is G-d's. He is invested in the world and so must we be. Indeed, Seforno insists that "our being G-d's treasured people" (Ex. 19:5) reflects our mission as a kingdom of kohanim-teachers to understand and to teach all of humankind to call out in the name of the Lord so that we may serve Him, shoulder to shoulder." We dare not retreat from the world or from history; we must destroy Amalek and enthrone G-d. We must be a powerful and exemplary nation-state fulfilling our Zionist mission to be G-d's witnesses and a light until the nations from our homeland in Zion. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In last week's parsha Rashi commented that when the Jewish people stated that they wanted to return to Egypt rather than proceeding to the Land of Israel they thereby intimated that they wanted to replace Moshe as their leader and crown a new king over them.

In this week's parsha, that earlier murmur of dissatisfaction with Moshe and his leadership becomes a full-throated shout. Korach pounces on the opportunity to attempt to replace Moshe, who has been weakened by the debacle of the spies and the resultant decree of death on the Jewish people of that generation. Korach undoubtedly harbored such ambitions for himself and his family for a long period of time.

He was disappointed and frustrated by not being appointed to the priesthood of Israel when Aharon and his sons were so chosen. He deemed himself to be the equal of Moshe and Aharon in every way and waits for what he will deem to be the proper moment to assert his claim.

In his mind, the proper moment is the one when Moshe appears to be most vulnerable. Moshe's popularity with the people is at a low ebb after the disastrous occurrences that most recently occurred to

the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai. Korach senses an opportunity to topple Moshe and has great ambitions for himself to be the replacement leader for the Jewish people.

It could very well have been that if there were an election held at that moment to choose the leader of the Jewish people; Moshe would be hard-pressed to win the favor of the majority of the voters. Yet, as the parsha makes abundantly clear, the Lord is not necessarily democratically inclined and strongly supports Moshe against His competitors and enemies.

One of the facets of human nature is that it always is looking for new leadership and new personalities to rule over them. To a great effect, the day after winning an election, the victor becomes a lame duck. While campaigning for office, promising everything to everybody and demanding a new vision and political and social change, the candidate is seen as being dynamic, charismatic and a person of vision.

Since it is the nature of human beings is to be eternally dissatisfied, the present is never sufficient to make us happy. It is always the future and the promises made to us by others regarding that future that holds our interest and initially even our loyalty. Korach effectively capitalizes on this all too common human trait. He finds a ready ear amongst sections of the Jewish people in his attempt to discredit Moshe and Aharon and promotes himself to become the leader of the Jewish people.

Moshe realizes the falseness of Korach's claims and the hypocrisy of his superficial piety and apparent public interest. But Moshe is also aware that no public debate with Korach and his supporters will sway them and prevent the open split within the Jewish people that they wish to promulgate.

Moshe has no recourse but to leave the matter to the judgment of Heaven, no matter what consequences may follow. There are many lessons in this story for us as well, if we look at ourselves and our society and leadership honestly and ignore the often-false visions of change for the sake of change itself.

©2015 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 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

How was it possible for Korach to rebel against Moses and defy his Divine commission? G-d said

to Moses at Sinai: "Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever" (Exodus 19:9).

How could G-d's promise to Moses be negated?

The Steipler Gaon answered that we must understand the nature of the Divine promise. It is an axiom of Judaism that a person has moral free will and that G-d does not control or interfere with a person's freedom of choice. This means that a person is free to believe or not to believe in Moses, and G-d did not impose this belief on anyone.

G-d's promise to Moses was that Israel's belief in Moses will never be undermined by philosophical speculation. On a purely intellectual and philosophical level, Korach would not have doubted Moses. However, because he was vain and envious, his distorted thinking led him to erroneous conclusions.

We take great pride in our reasoning abilities. We should realize how sensitive these are and how easily they can be influenced by emotions and desires to lead us to false conclusions. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

AL SHEIM HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"L

Bais Hamussar

Chazal (Pesachim 119a) tell us that Korach's fabulous wealth ultimately led to his demise. The Medrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7) elaborates on this idea: "Three gifts were created in this world: wisdom, strength and wealth. One who merits any one of these has the ability to merit everything. However, this is only true when the gifts are Heavenly bestowed... When these gifts do not come from Hashem they will eventually cease. Our Rabbis taught: There were two extremely wise men in the world -- Achitofel a Jew and Bilam a gentile -- and both perished. There were two strong men in the world -- Shimshon a Jew and Goliath a gentile -- and both perished. There were two wealthy men in the world -- Korach a Jew and Haman a gentile -- and both perished. Why? Because their gifts were not from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, rather, they grabbed the gifts for themselves."

What does it mean that these gifts were not given to them from Hashem? Theoretically we could have explained it to mean that although Hashem did not intend for them to have these gifts, nevertheless their intense desire for them caused Hashem to acquiesce to their wishes as Chazal assert, "A man is taken along the path he wishes to take." However, this cannot be the case because Hashem gave Shimshon his strength initially in order to fulfill the prophecy that was told to his parents before he was born that he would deliver Bnei Yisrael from their oppressors. Also, it seems from Chazal that Hashem intentionally

endowed Bilam with prophecy and wisdom so that the nations of the world would not be able to claim that had they been granted a spiritual guide they too would have refrained from transgressions.

The Chovos Halevovos writes (Yichud Ha'maaseh chap. 5) regarding wisdom, that when it is used properly it is the panacea for all ailments, and when it is misused it develops into a full blown disease which has no cure or treatment. With this in mind, says Rav Wolbe (Ale Shur vol. II p. 606), we can understand the statement of Chazal. All three of the gifts mentioned are given to a person to be utilized in the manner intended by Hashem. As Yirmiyahu declared (9:22,23) "The wise man should not glorify himself with his wisdom, the strong man should not glorify himself with his strength and the rich man should not glorify himself with his wealth. For only with this may one glorify himself -- contemplating and knowing Me." The gifts are given as a means of getting to know Hashem. If they are used to this end one will continue to benefit from them, but if they are misused he has in effect "grabbed" them from Hashem and they will not endure.

Hashem grants every person countless gifts and numerous talents. We were endowed with these gifts to aid us in our avodas Hashem. It behooves us to take inventory of our gifts and talents to determine if we are using them properly or if we are using them at all. What a waste it would be if we had the talents which would enable us to help others and we simply weren't cognizant of them. And how pathetic it would be if we held the keys to our own success in our back pocket and we simply were not aware of them. Hashem gave us talents to use in furthering avodas Hashem on a personal level, a communal level and quite possibly they could even be employed to benefit the entire Klal Yisrael! © 2015 The AishDas Society

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd G-d said to Aharon, 'you and your sons and the House of Your Father will bear the sin of the Sanctuary, and you and your sons will bear the sin of your Priesthood'" (Bamidbar 18:1). Rashi tells us that even though the Torah says that G-d said this to Aharon (without Moshe being mentioned), this communication was really said to Moshe, who was told to communicate it to Aharon." The Sifre (117) is usually cited as Rashi's source, but that Midrash is explaining a different verse (8:8), leading many commentaries to discuss why Rashi took a concept that the Midrash taught on a later verse and applied it to this verse. However, there are other Midrashim (e.g. Sifre Zuta) that say G-d communicated with Aharon through Moshe (and not directly with Aharon) regarding this verse, which could be Rashi's source (not the Sifre). Nevertheless, it is still curious that the Sifre only teaches us this on the later verse, while Rashi chose to

teach it to us on this verse.

Even more curious is that Rashi (Vayikra 1:1) quotes Toras Kohanim (Dibura d'N'dava 1:2:1), which says that there are 13 places in the Torah where the verbiage excludes Aharon from having direct communication with G-d, and there are 11 times where there is a "dibur" (a more direct form of communication than "amirah") to both Moshe and Aharon, and two where the "dibur" is to only Aharon (and the 13 "exclusions" are said to exclude "dibur"), indicating that when the communication is described as an "amirah," it could have been directly with Aharon. Since the communication described in 8:1 was an "amirah," and Rashi had told us that only those described as a "dibur" were excluded, how can Rashi tell us that this communication was also excluded, with G-d not speaking to Aharon directly but telling Moshe to relay the communication to him?

As far as the Sifre is concerned, since it also references the 13 exclusions (at the end of Parashas Naso), only mentioning Aharon being excluded from direct communication with G-d on 8:8, which is a "dibur," not on 8:1, which is an "amirah," makes sense. And since Rashi had already told us that for the 13 "dib'ros" where Aharon is mentioned the communication was not with Aharon directly, but through Moshe, there is no need for Rashi to say it again on 8:8. But how can Rashi also apply this to the "amirah" of 8:1 as well?

[Interestingly, when there is a "dibur" to both Moshe and Aharon telling them to "separate from this congregation" so that G-d can "destroy them" (16:20-21), both Moshe and Aharon "fell on their faces and said, 'Mighty One, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, one man sins and with the entire congregation You get angry?' If the "dibur" was only to Moshe, who then told it to Aharon, yet they both "fell on their faces," Moshe must have waited to tell Aharon what G-d said before reacting to it. Even though G-d was already communicating with him, and "falling on his face" to beseech G-d not to destroy them would seem much smoother as a continuation of the same communication (which could have happened if the communication was to both Moshe and Aharon, as opposed to just Moshe), since it was only Moshe whom G-d was communicating with, Moshe had to end the communication, go tell Aharon what G-d had just told him, and then restart his communication with G-d (while Aharon started his own communication with Him) in order to beg Him not to destroy the nation.

This may explain why Moshe thought that the "them" G-d meant to destroy was the entire nation, not just those who had sinned; even though he was told to "relay this communication to others" ("leimor"), Moshe thought G-d meant to relay it to Aharon, with the "them" referring to everyone else (i.e. the whole nation). G-d really meant that he should tell the nation to separate

from the sinners, with the "them" being the sinners. Since the words "and to Aharon" mean that Moshe should relay it to Aharon, not that Aharon was included in the communication, the word "leimor" must refer to someone other than Aharon, i.e. the nation. Moshe didn't "see" this verse until he wrote it down afterwards, and may have misunderstood who was included in the "others" he was supposed to relay it to. Granted, this may be problematic, as it means that Moshe didn't fully understand what G-d was telling him, but according to those commentators who understand the "back and forth" as Moshe misunderstanding who G-d meant to destroy (as opposed to G-d changing His mind because of Moshe and Aharon's supplications), this could explain the mechanics of the misunderstanding.]

There are two ways to understand the difference between "amirah" (i.e. "vayomer") and "dibur" (i.e. "vayidaber"), at least as far as whether Aharon was included or excluded. Because "amirah" is a less direct form of communication, it could include Aharon, as Aharon could (and, since he was also a prophet, did, at least sometimes) communicate directly with G-d (as opposed to "dibur," which is reserved for Moshe). Or, because "amirah" could refer to a form of communication that is not direct at all, but a message relayed through someone else, such as when G-d told Rivka through Shem why she was having difficulty with her pregnancy (see Rashi on B'reishis 25:23) and when Yisro told Moshe through a third party that he and his daughter (Moshe's wife) and their sons had arrived (see Rashi on Sh'mos 18:6), it could mean that the message for Aharon from G-d was relayed to him through someone else (i.e. Moshe). Which one was it?

Included in this communication were instructions for protecting the Sanctuary from those who didn't belong, and by extension, for protecting those who don't belong from being adversely affected by getting too close to the Sanctuary (which is what the nation had expressed concern about, and what these instructions were a response to). Since these instructions had the status of "Torah law," they must have been taught through Moshe, with Moshe having communicated directly with G-d about it. Therefore, when the Torah says that G-d communicated this to Aharon, it must have been through Moshe. This was the point Rashi was making; even though "amirah" could refer to a direct communication between G-d and Aharon, in this case (at least) it wasn't. Rather, Moshe was told to tell it to Aharon, who was in charge of protecting the Sanctuary.

When the Midrashim tell us that there are 13 "exclusions" to teach us that even though it says there was a "dibur" from G-d to Aharon it was really through Moshe (with Moshe telling it to Aharon), it doesn't mean that only those communications that qualify as a "dibur" came through Moshe but those that came through an "amirah" were direct. Rather, only those that are

described as being a "dibur," which implies a more direct communication, need to be excluded so that we know it wasn't a direct communication. Those communications described as an "amirah" don't need to be excluded, as the fact that they are an "amirah" itself tells us that they aren't necessarily a direct communication. There being 13 "exclusions" doesn't automatically mean that all other communications were done directly, only that there were only 13 communications that needed exclusions. All the others could have been direct, or could have been through a third party (i.e. Moshe). This one, Rashi tells us, was through Moshe. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

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

The answer can be found in Rashi, the great medieval commentator, who writes that just as Korach's family camped on the southern side of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), so did the tribe of Reuven. Rashi quotes the words of Chapters of the Fathers, "woe to an evil person, and woe to his neighbor." The 250 people met their death, simply because they were influenced by their neighbors! This points to the awesome influence that friends, neighbors and associates have on us. So who do we surround ourselves with? Do we have positive friends and neighbors? Are WE positive friends and neighbors to others? © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

Every man must bring his fire pan and place incense within it, and offer it before G-d. (Bamidbar 16:17) Recently I published a new book called "Deeper Perceptions," b"H, which like "Perceptions," is on the weekly Torah reading. However, as the title indicates, the divrei Torah, for the most part, are deeper. (Yes, this is also a plug for the new book.) Nevertheless, I am going to "borrow" a dvar Torah from there for this week's Perceptions, since it is an important message for everyone.

The offering of incense -- ketores -- was so primary in the Temple service that it had an altar of its own, which was actually inside the Sanctuary where only a kohen could enter. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, a major part of the service was the

offering of the incense inside the Kodesh Kodashim -- the Holy of Holies.

The Incense Offering figures very prominently in the Torah narrative as well. In Parashas Shemini it was the cause of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, the two oldest sons of Aharon HaKohen. In this week's parshah the ketores is used to ferret out impostors, because after Korach and his assembly demand to be kohanim as well, Moshe Rabbeinu tells them: "Take for yourselves censers. Place fire into them and put incense upon them before G-d tomorrow, and the man whom G-d chooses is the holy one." (Bamidbar 16:6-7)

The ketores, however, was not only an instrument for Divine judgment: "Moshe said to Aharon, 'Take the fire pan and put on it fire from upon the Altar and place incense. Take [it] quickly to the assembly and provide atonement for them, because the wrath has gone out from the Presence of G-d; the plague has begun!'" (Bamidbar 17:11)

"Why [did Moshe have Aharon stop the plague] with incense? Because the Jewish people were jeering and complaining about the incense saying, 'It is deadly poison: Nadav and Avihu died through it [and] 250 died because of it.' The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, 'You shall see that it stops plagues [as well], and that it is sin that kills.'" (Rashi)

What was so unique about the Incense-Offering? The answer has to do with the number of spices of which it was comprised, eleven, a number that represents the tikun of Creation:

"There is a profound reason why the cycle-length of the sun and moon are not equal, but rather that the sun's extends beyond the moon's by 11 days... The Malchus is missing 11 lights, which are from the 320, 280, and 288 Sparks, and which are continuously being rectified until the arrival of Moshiach. Thus, because of these 11 lights that are missing from the Malchus, there are 11 days missing from the lunar calendar with respect to the solar one." (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Drush Miyut HaLavanah, Siman 6)

As it turns out, everything that goes wrong in Creation has to do with the number 11, even our enemies and the evil they create: "Eleven days journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea by way of Mt. Seir." (Devarim 1:2)

It says in the Sifri: Had the Jewish people merited the 11 days they would have entered the Land, because the 11 days would have overcome the 11 klipos, which are the 11 chiefs of Eisav. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 3, Siman 6)

The 11 chiefs of Eisav are the ones mentioned at the end of Parashas Vayishlach. Their entire existence was only made possible because of the 11 lights that remained unrectified at the start of Creation, and which the Jewish people are destined to rectify. They do this either consciously or as a result of what happens to them throughout history. Performing the

service of the Incense Offering was a major part of this rectification process.

The number also represents another very central Torah concept, that of Da'as. The word simply means "knowledge," but in Kabbalah it refers to a specific kind of knowledge, G-dly knowledge:

"If you want it like money and pursue it like buried treasures, then you will understand fear of G-d; Da'as Elokim -- G-dly knowledge -- you will find." (Mishlei 2:4)

What is the connection between Da'as and the number eleven? In general there are only ten sefiros, but in some instances the sefirah of Da'as is also included, making it the eleventh sefirah, in a manner of speaking. Therefore, the eleven-spice incense also alludes to the so-called eleventh sefirah of Da'as.

There is also a conceptual reason why the incense offered as part of the Temple service alluded to the idea of Da'as Elokim. The process by which the incense was produced is similar to the process through which a person arrives at truth: grinding.

The incense was comprised of natural, raw elements that were often soaked in certain liquids to scent them, after which they were dried and ground into powder form. They were later combined and prepared in a special manner that was a secret tradition known only to, and protected against non-Temple use by, a particular family.

The intellectual process works in a similar manner. The world is filled with many "raw" ideas, most of which if taken at face value can be confusing and misdirect people. Just as food must be chewed to be properly digested so must information be "chewed," even "ground down" and refined to be properly "digested" intellectually.

When this process, often referred to as the "Talmudic Process," is implemented, ideas are refined. It becomes easier for a person to discern the truth or falsehood of a concept, to determine which ideas are worthy of incorporation and which ones ought to be rejected. This is what allows a person to construct a healthy and accurate "big picture" vision of Creation and history, one that is a sweet "fragrance" to G-d and the person.

The Talmud states: "A person only sins when a spirit of insanity enters him." (Sotah 3a)

The Talmud is saying that sane people do not sin. After all, by sinning a person rejects G-d which by definition is insane. The only problem is that even righteous people sin at some point, as it says: "For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and does not sin." (Koheles 7:20)

The actual Hebrew is "shtus," which more accurately translates as "stupidity" or "nonsense." In other words, the person who sinned either did not have or lost perspective of the seriousness of their violation. Sinners are people who does not have an intellectual or

emotional appreciation of the extent of their violations. Otherwise, they would see the wastefulness of their actions and abandon them.

This was Korach and his assembly, which is why Moshe Rabbeinu told him: "Is it not enough that the G-d of Israel has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Mishkan of G-d and to stand before the congregation to minister to them? He drew you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you, and now you seek the kehunah as well? Therefore, you and your entire company who are assembled are against G-d, for what is Aharon that you should complain against him?" (Bamidbar 16:9-11)

In essence, Moshe Rabbeinu was asking Korach, "Are you crazy? Do you realize who you challenge? Do you appreciate what you stand to lose?" It is also why he chose the ketores as the means to make his point, as if to say, "Think it through Korach. If you work it through maybe you will come to your senses and realize your nonsense and end your rebellion."

It was a valiant effort on Moshe Rabbeinu's part. The problem was that Korach was closed off from hearing his point. It was the humblest man on earth facing off against one of the most arrogant, which was another reason why the ketores was the "weapon" of choice against the rebellion. Being consumed by fire and then ascending as smoke Heavenward symbolized the humility that Korach did not have, and the source of his intellectual blindness.

In fact, the gematria of "Moshe" is 345, whereas the gematria of "Korach" is 308. The difference between the two is 37, the gematria of "hevel," which means "breath," something fleeting and almost nonexistent. Moshe had Korach's boldness, but it was tempered by his "hevel," that is, his humility. This made him charismatic, but unlike Korach, he used his charisma on behalf of G-d, not against Him. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

