

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Covenant & Conversation

The story of Korach has much to teach us about one of the most disturbing phenomena of our time: the rise of populism in contemporary politics. Korach was a populist, one of the first in recorded history -- and populism has re-emerged in the West, as it did in the 1930s, posing great danger to the future of freedom.

Populism is the politics of anger. (The best recent treatment is Jan-Werner Muller's short book, *What is Populism?*, Penguin, 2017. See also the important paper, *Populism: The Phenomenon*, Bridgewater associates, 22 March 2017.)

It makes its appearance when there is widespread discontent with political leaders, when people feel that heads of institutions are working in their own interest rather than that of the general public, when there is a widespread loss of trust and a breakdown of the sense of the common good.

People come to feel that the distribution of rewards is unfair: a few gain disproportionately and the many stay static or lose. There is also a feeling that the country they once knew has been taken away from them, whether because of the undermining of traditional values or because of large scale immigration.

Discontent takes the form of the rejection of current political and cultural elites. Populist politicians claim that they, and they alone, are the true voice of the people. The others, the existing leaders, are sharing out the rewards among themselves, indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Populists stir up resentment against the establishment. They are deliberately divisive and confrontational. They promise strong leadership that will give the people back what has been taken from them.

In 2017, support for populist parties throughout Europe was running at around 35 per cent, the highest level since the late 1930s. Parties of the Far Right gained power in Poland and Hungary, and made a strong showing in Austria, France and Holland. In Southern Europe, in countries like Spain and Greece, populism tends to be of the Left. Regardless of what form it takes, when populism is on the rise, tyranny is around the corner. (See James Snyder, *On Tyranny: 20 Lessons from the 20th Century*, Bodley Head, 2017.)

Human rights are dispensed with. The public

grants the strong leader exceptional powers: so it was in the 1930s with Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. People are willing to sacrifice their freedom for the promised utopia, and to tolerate great evils against whichever scapegoat the leader chooses to blame for the nation's problems.

The Korach rebellion was a populist movement, and Korach himself an archetypal populist leader. Listen carefully to what he said about Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3).

These are classic populist claims. First, implies Korach, the establishment (Moses and Aaron) is corrupt. Moses has been guilty of nepotism in appointing his own brother as High Priest. He has kept the leadership roles within his immediate family instead of sharing them out more widely. Second, Korach presents himself as the people's champion. The whole community, he says, is holy. There is nothing special about you, Moses and Aaron. We have all seen God's miracles and heard His voice. We all helped build His Sanctuary. Korach is posing as the democrat so that he can become the autocrat.

Next, he and his fellow rebels mount an impressive campaign of fake news -- anticipating events of our own time. We can infer this indirectly. When Moses says to God, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them" (Num. 16:15), it is clear that he has been accused of just that: exploiting his office for personal gain. When 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 own idea" (Num. 16:28) it is equally clear that he has been accused of representing his own decisions as the will and word of God.

Most blatant is the post-truth claim of Dathan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you want to lord it over us!" (Num. 16:13). This is the most callous speech in the Torah. It combines false nostalgia for Egypt (a "land flowing with milk and honey"!), blaming Moses for the report of the spies, and accusing him of holding on to leadership for his own personal prestige -- all three, outrageous lies.

Ramban was undoubtedly correct

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(Commentary to Num. 16:1) when he says that such a challenge to Moses' leadership would have been impossible at any earlier point. Only in the aftermath of the episode of the spies, when the people realised that they would not see the Promised Land in their lifetime, could discontent be stirred by Korach and his assorted fellow-travellers. They felt they had nothing to lose. Populism is the politics of disappointment, resentment and fear.

For once in his life, Moses acted autocratically, putting God, as it were, to the test: "This is how you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord." (Num. 16:28-30).

This dramatic effort at conflict resolution by the use of force (in this case, a miracle) failed completely. The ground did indeed open up and swallow Korach and his fellow rebels, but the people, despite their terror, were unimpressed. "On the next day, however, the whole congregation of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the Lord' (Num. 17:6). Jews have always resisted autocratic leaders.

What is even more striking is the way the sages framed the conflict. Instead of seeing it as a black-and-white contrast between rebellion and obedience, they insisted on the validity of argument in the public domain. They said that what was wrong with Korach and his fellows was not that they argued with Moses and Aaron, but that they did so "not for the sake of Heaven." The schools of Hillel and Shammai, however, argued for the sake of Heaven, and thus their argument had enduring value. (Mishneh Avot 5:20) Judaism, as I argued in *Covenant and Conversation Shemot* this year, is unique in the fact that virtually all of its canonical texts are anthologies of arguments.

What matters in Judaism is why the argument was undertaken and how it was conducted. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is one that is

undertaken for the sake of victory. An argument for the sake of Heaven is undertaken for the sake of truth. When the aim is victory, as it was in the case of Korach, both sides are diminished. Korach died, and Moses' authority was tarnished. But when the aim is truth, both sides gain. To be defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. As R. Shimon ha-Amsoni said: "Just as I received reward for the exposition, so I will receive reward for the retraction." (Pesachim 22b)

In his excellent short book, *What is Populism?*, Jan-Werner Muller argues that the best indicator of populist politics is its delegitimation of other voices. Populists claim that "they and they alone represent the people." Anyone who disagrees with them is "essentially illegitimate." Once in power, they silence dissent. That is why the silencing of unpopular views in university campuses today, in the form of "safe space," "trigger warnings," and "micro-aggressions," is so dangerous. When academic freedom dies, the death of other freedoms follows.

Hence the power of Judaism's defence against populism in the form of its insistence on the legitimacy of "argument for the sake of Heaven." Judaism does not silence dissent: to the contrary, it dignifies it. This was institutionalised in the biblical era in the form of the prophets who spoke truth to power. In the rabbinic era it lived in the culture of argument evident on every page of the Mishnah, Gemara and their commentaries. In the contemporary State of Israel, argumentativeness is part of the very texture of its democratic freedom, in the strongest possible contrast to much of the rest of the Middle East.

Hence the life-changing idea: If you seek to learn, grow, pursue truth and find freedom, seek places that welcome argument and respect dissenting views. Stay far from people, places and political parties that don't. Though they claim to be friends of the people, they are in fact the enemies of freedom. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Korah, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi took Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav... and they rose up in confrontation before Moses..." (Numbers 16:1, 2) Why didn't the Israelites rise up against the rebels who dared defy Moses, the selfless man of G-d who gave up a luxurious and carefree life as Prince of Egypt in order to liberate a slave people from tyranny?

Reading between the lines of this amazing story, we discern two distinct ideological positions and political platforms, which between them represented the

majority of Hebrews. Both these positions were antithetical to everything that Moses stood for and the adumbrations of the Korah Wars are still to be heard today, thousands of years later, festering at the very heart of Israeli society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

the physical elements with His special "clouds of glory".

Why leave this ethereal, spiritual haven for the wars, political arguments, economic crises and social challenges necessary to establish a nation state? For reasons of "frumkeit" (religiosity) alone, Korah argues that the Israelites are better off remaining in the desert-Kollel, freed from all decision-making and responsibility.

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

Even if Korah's quest for "desert-Kollel sanctity" had been sincere, it did not reflect G-d's mission for Israel. G-d wants us to establish a nation-state and to take responsibility to perfect an imperfect world, with all of the challenges that entails. This is the message of the ritual fringes: the white strings represent the white wool of the sheep, the animalistic aspect of our lives and our world. These must be sanctified by the sky-blue color of t'chelet, the symbol of the Divine seen by the elders at the time of the Revelation at Sinai (Exodus 24:10). When we gaze upon the ritual fringes, we must remember our true mission: to enter history, to risk impurity by taking up the challenges of the real world, and to assume our responsibility to become a "sacred nation and kingdom of Priest-Teachers" to the world (Exodus 19:6 S'forno ad loc).

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

They too are punished by G-d, who causes the earth for which their materialistic spirits yearned so

mightily, to swallow them up alive (Numbers 16:35 Ibn Ezra ad loc). Because of their passion for physical pleasures, they never learn to look properly upon the t'chelet of the ritual fringes. They saw neither the royal blue of their majestic ancestry – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, passionate followers of G-d and lovers of the Land of Israel- nor the sapphire blue of the Divine presence in the world summoning us to His service.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In one of his more surprising and controversial statements, Maimonides posits that our great teacher and leader Moshe was subject to becoming angry at certain occasions during his 40-year leadership of the Jewish people. Being a leader, constantly in the public eye and subject to the human inclination to criticize leadership, no matter how able and enlightened it truly is, certainly can bring one to moments of deep frustration, agitation and anger.

In recounting the unwarranted rebellion and complaints of Korach and his followers against Moshe and Aharon, it is apparent that Moshe has become emotionally angry at what is happening. He asks of God to create, so to speak, a supernatural punishment for Korach and his followers. Perhaps it is the cumulative effect of the carping and negativity, the rebellions and sins that have marked the Jewish sojourn in Sinai that has finally sapped the patience and fortitude of Moshe.

There is no question that Korach and his group deserved this punishment, for we see that God, so to speak, concurred in bringing about their eventual fate. It is somewhat noteworthy to realize that Moshe who defended the Jewish people and prayed for the mitigation of their punishment when they sinned, though decisions were very severe in this instance, reacts in such a harsh and unforgiving manner. Even though Maimonides lists anger as being one of the two traits that one should go to an extreme to avoid, this week's Torah reading is an example of the justifiable anger of Moshe.

Moshe is able to counter and even tolerate the sins of the Jewish people that stem from human weaknesses and desires. Most of the rebellions that appear in the Torah are of this nature. People complain and chafe under rules of diet, sexual probity and internal discipline. However, when there is a rebellion against Godly order in society, when God's will is reduced to political machinations and personal ambition, then the entire structure of Jewish life and the eternity of Israel is threatened.

Moshe, in his leadership role, correctly identifies that neither he nor his brother are the real targets of the rebellion of Korach and his followers. It is rather the entire value system and societal

arrangement that God has ordained for the Jewish people to follow that is being attacked and undermined. If the basic structure of Jewish society crumbles, then there will be no chance of survival as a holy people and a kingdom of priests.

It is this realization, subtle as it may be and unpopular in the eyes of the masses, that kindles the frustration and anger of Moshe and forces him to ask that Korach and his followers become an example for all generations, for substituting God's will and wisdom with human political correctness and ambition. It is a painful lesson that this week's Torah reading teaches us, about the dangers of altering Jewish societal norms and leadership qualifications. But it is an important lesson for our times as well. ©2018 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

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

Important lessons emerge: First Moshe teaches that it is critical for religious leaders to become involved in social action. After all, time and time again Moshe not only teaches ritual law, but also how the Jewish people must function as a people, a nation with laws, government and showing concern for all.

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

There is another lesson that can be learned. Inevitably, when one becomes involved in leadership, they will incur the wrath of some. A wise, elderly man taught me this lesson. On the day I left my first pulpit in St. Louis, he approached me and said, "Rabbi, I bless you that you should have many enemies." I looked at him startled. "We've been close, why such a harsh

lesson?" "My words are meant as a blessing," he responded. "Remember, if you do nothing, you have no enemies. A sign that you're doing, that you're taking stands is that you have enemies."

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

Too many rabbinic leaders shy away from taking strong political positions, fearful that they will alienate their boards and congregants. They forget the warning of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, a rabbi who is disliked by all is not a mensch, and a rabbi who is loved by all is not a rabbi. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

After hearing the complaints of the rebellious Korach and his associates, Moshe cries out to G-d not to accept their offerings and insists that he had never wronged any of them in any way. As Moshe knew that his actions were legitimate, why was he so seemingly defensive about Korach's criticism? After all, G-d knew that Moshe was in the right and had not wronged Korach or his allies -- why did Moshe feel the need to make his case before Him?

Daniel Lifshitz suggests that perhaps we can answer based on a comment of the Tiferet Yisrael to the Mishna in Avot, "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." The Tiferet Yisrael notes that some of the most important people to learn from are those who dislike us. They are the ones who shine a spotlight on our every shortcoming. Their criticism may include much exaggeration or even outright falsehood, but often it also contains a grain of truth. Focusing on these grains of truth can help us learn what areas of our conduct or character could use improvement. Moshe understood this concept and when Korach hurled accusations at him, he took advantage of the opportunity for honest self-assessment. His conclusion was that the complaints were baseless and said as much to Hashem, but only after going through introspection and accounting before Hashem. This type of reaction goes against most people's instincts, but it can help turn unpleasant situations into opportunities for personal growth. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

The Co-Conspirators

The rebellion of Korach introduces us by name to two individuals who become the epitome of rebellion in many significant Midrashim. Though

Korach led the rebellion and is punished accordingly, Datan and Aviram from the tribe of R'uvein are two of the three named co-conspirators in this rebellion of two hundred and fifty men. Datan and Aviram blamed Moshe for the assignment of the double-portion of the firstborn of Ya'akov to the two sons of Yosef instead of to their tribe of R'uvein. The fact that it was Ya'akov, not Moshe, who had been responsible for taking away the double-portion from the tribe of R'uvein did not matter to them as this was another opportunity for them to display their dislike for authority. Datan and Aviram are named by Midrashim as rebels against leadership in several previous incidents in the Torah where names are not mentioned together with deeds. But there were other aspects of their rebellion which we may discover.

The rebellion of Korach is the only time that we find the names of Datan and Aviram mentioned in the Torah in relationship to an act of rebellion. Yet the Gemara Nedarim (64b) instructs us that anytime in the Torah where we find the words "nitzim" or "nitzavim", quarrelers, we are to understand that the Torah is referring to Datan and Aviram. The Gemara and the midrashim make Datan and Aviram the unnamed Jewish men who were fighting with each other when Moshe separated them and reprimanded them. Datan had also been the Jew who was previously struck by the Egyptian and Moshe had saved his life. In spite of this, Datan and Aviram were the ones who told Par'oh about Moshe and caused Moshe to flee. According to Midrash, Datan and Aviram were the ones who complained at the Red Sea saying, "Perhaps there were no graves left in Egypt that you (Moshe) had to take us out to die in the desert." Midrash also credits them with setting out of the Manna on Shabbat to indicate that Moshe was not a true spokesman for Hashem. Their negativity was always focused against leadership. They did not want to be told by someone else what they should or must do. Some of the Rabbis argue that they wanted to become the leaders, but I would think that they wanted to have no leaders. They wanted each person to be able to do as he pleased without any control. More importantly they wanted to convince others to prefer the same thing. This was not only a rebellion for them against Moshe and Aharon's leadership but against any leadership whatsoever. Their rebellion was actually against Hashem and the right of Hashem to command their behavior.

Nechama Leibovitz describes an argument for the sake of Heaven as one in which each side is not invested in a particular outcome of the argument but both are seeking the Truth. Each of the people involved in Korach's rebellion came together seeking something for himself. Datan and Aviram had a personal grudge against Moshe as well as against anyone who held a leadership position over them. They wanted to destroy anyone in power even though Moshe had saved them from the Egyptian. They were

also angry that the tribe of R'uvein was displaced from its leadership position as the bechor. The Ibn Ezra even says that all of the conspirators were b'chorim and were insulted that the Levi'im took away their responsibilities in the Temple. But this was not true of Datan and Aviram.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, the Aznayim L'Torah, gives us an insight into their behavior and their motivation. Datan and Aviram were Shotrim, Jews who were the guards of other Jews who were the slaves in Egypt. They were similar to the kapos who were the Jewish guards of the Nazi concentration camps. Their personal wealth and influence was dependent on their position as Shotrim. They benefitted from carrying out Par'oh's enslavement of their fellow Jews. At one point, they must have lost favor in Par'oh's eyes (possibly he sensed their dislike of all leaders) and they were stripped of their positions and their wealth. That is what the Torah means when it says that "all those who sought your death in Egypt have died." We are told that "ani k'meit, a poor person is as if he died." He has lost both money and influence. Datan and Aviram's constant rebellion against Moshe was with the hope that the Jews would return to Egypt and they would regain their source of influence with Par'oh. When it became clear that this would not happen, they helped to stir up the people with Korach's rebellion in order to be in a leadership position with Korach. They saw this as an opportunity to return to a position of wealth and influence. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that normally when a person is worthy of death from Hashem, Hashem mercifully first makes him poor in order to encourage him to do teshuvah. With Datan and Aviram, their leadership in a rebellion which questioned Hashem's authority eliminated that opportunity for teshuvah.

Even though Datan and Aviram were beyond hope, Moshe gave them an opportunity to reverse their actions. Moshe called to them separately for a private conference in which they would not be forced to lose face before their fellow conspirators. Their answer was simply, "we will not go up." Their insults continued by using Moshe's words, twisting them to insult him further: "Is it no small matter that you brought us up from a land of milk and honey to kill us in the desert." Even in the end when Moshe told everyone to move away from the tents of the rebels, Datan and Aviram stood proudly and defiantly in front of their tents with their wives and children placed in jeopardy. Even Korach's family separated from Korach and did not suffer the same punishment as he.

Datan and Aviram are not much different than we are. We are so complacent with our lives that we find any change difficult. We prefer to blame others for our failures instead of examining ourselves. When our livelihood is challenged, we fight to keep our jobs even though we might hate them. Most importantly, when

we are disciplined and given the opportunity to correct our mistakes, we fail to recognize our shortcomings and accept the need to change. May the lesson of Datan and Aviram enlighten us to be open to constructive criticism and accept our need to change. Hashem will assist us in our efforts. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Guarding the Temple

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

In this week's portion the Torah States "And you and your brothers with you before the tent of meeting" ("V'atah uvanecha Itcha lefnei Ohel Moed") which we derive that the Kohanim and the Leviim were commanded to guard the Temple. This was done not to necessarily actually guard the Temple, but rather as an act of respect and honor ("Kavod"). In fact the Kohanim and Leviim when carrying out this task wore their priestly garments (kohanim and Leviim were not permitted to wear their priestly clothes when sleeping). Children were not allowed to accomplish this task, only a Kohen or Levi that was above the age of twenty, even though they are forbidden to carry out any other assignment in the Temple at this age.

Because this was classified as a task ("Avodah") one must theoretically, out of respect, stand while performing it. However our sages, because of the great strain on the individual, allowed one to sit while carrying out this task, (though in all cases one was not permitted to sit in the courtyard of the Temple) because sitting was a pre-requisite to guarding the Temple properly.

Our sages differ as to the time that this "guarding" took place. The Rambam (Maimonides) states that it was only applicable in the evenings, however according to the explanation of the sages of the Mishna in Tamid, it would seem that this was prevalent all the time.

Additionally, there is controversy as to whether in all places designated, the Temple was guarded during all hours of the day and night, or there were certain areas that were only guarded during the day but not a night. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Stick Figures

The 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. ©2018 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Following the events of the Korach episode, the Torah clearly delineates the role of the Kohanim and Leviim. Although they participated in different ways in the service of the Mishkan, they are both given the mitzvah of Shemiras HaMikdash -- the guarding of the Mishkan, and in subsequent years, the Beis HaMikdash. There are two reasons for this mitzvah. Rashi (Bamidbar 18:2) focuses on the practical goal of guarding the Mishkan in order to prevent a non-Kohen from entering. By contrast, the Rambam (Hilchos Beis Habechira 8:1) highlights that guarding is not for any practical concern, but rather, it is an expression of honor for the location. The Rambam compares this to a palace that is guarded simply as a sign of respect.

Shemira -- guarding -- plays an important role in many areas of mitzvah observance. There is an obligation to institute safeguards to protect the mitzvos. This requirement is derived from the wording of the Torah, "You should guard my precepts" (Vayikra 18:30). Guarding the mitzvos by instituting rabbinic prohibitions accomplishes two things. On a practical level, it prevents one from violating a Torah prohibition. By not moving a pencil on Shabbos, one will most likely not come to write. But rabbinic restrictions also accomplish another goal. By observing these additional protective measures, we demonstrate our reverence for the Torah laws. Just as the palace of the king must be guarded as an indication of honor and respect, so too, do the mitzvos warrant our recognition of their significance.

Although all of the mitzvos require protection, the mitzvah of Shabbos is unique in that Shabbos observance is described as "guarding the Shabbos." In the realm of hilchos Shabbos, there are numerous rabbinic prohibitions. These serve not only to prevent actual Shabbos violation, they also serve to elevate the significance of Shabbos in our eyes. It is precisely because Shabbos is such a precious treasure that we must guard it by meticulously observing every rabbinic

safeguard.

The Torah speaks numerous times about guarding and performing the mitzvos. Chazal interpret guarding as referring to talmud Torah. Studying Torah serves a dual function as a guard for Torah observance. First, Torah study lends to practice in a direct manner; one who is not knowledgeable about the intricacies of mitzvah observance will not be able to properly perform the mitzvos. Torah study also indicates our appreciation of the mitzvos. Chazal compare the words of Torah to a King's decree. One who analyzes and reviews every nuance of the King's word is showing the proper reverence for the King. Similarly, our involvement in Torah study is an expression of honor and respect for Hashem's Word. By studying Torah, we are guarding our most precious treasure.

We have been entrusted by Hashem with many gifts. Mikdash, Shabbos, Torah and mitzvos must be guarded as they are our most sacred possessions. By according them the utmost honor and respect, we show true reverence for Hashem Who bestowed these treasures upon us. ©2018 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

"They assembled against Moshe and Aaron, and said to them, '(RAV LACHEM) -- You have too much for yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and HASHEM is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the HASHEM's assembly?'" (Bamidbar 16:3)

"You have too much for yourselves: You took by far too much greatness for yourselves!" -- Rashi

(Moshe speaking to Korach and his followers)

"Place fire into them and put incense upon them before HASHEM tomorrow, and the man whom HASHEM chooses he is the holy one; (RAV LACHEM) you have too much for yourselves, sons of Levi." (Bamidbar 16:7)

The Torah treats us to the actual statement of Moshe in his brief retort-rebuke to Korach and his rebellious troops, "(RAV LACHEM) you have much for yourselves, sons of Levi." These words no doubt are packed with multiple layers of meaning. What was Moshe saying?

On a simple level he was responding to their false accusation. The Talmud says, "Kol HaPosel, B'Mumo Posel" -- Anyone who faults another, it is with his own fault!" They were accusing Moshe of being "politically" ambitious when in fact it was they who were trying to usurp power. Moshe was holding a mirror for them to see themselves.

It could also be that Moshe was referring to an exchange between Yaakov and Eisav. When Eisav at first tried to rebuff the gifts of his brother he stated, "Yeish Li Rav" -- "I have plenty!" Yaakov responded to

Eisav with the words, "Yeish Li Kol". "I have everything!" Implied in Eisav's words is that he has plenty in quantitative terms and he is open to receiving even more! Yaakov's claim is that he has everything qualitatively and needs no more! Eisav in contradistinction wanted more and more!

While Korach spoke in high platitudes about the whole nation being holy, Moshe detected that it was his familial claim to authority that was fueling the uprising. By referring to "Bnei Levi" -- "Sons of Levi" he was exposing Korach true selfish motive.

There is another obvious reason for Moshe to tell Korach and his followers that they have plenty. There is a simple test for jealousy. I have tried it on many children with surprising results. Offer a child the following theoretical scenario. What if...I give you a candy!? The child will be very happy about that proposition. What if...I offer you and your brother or sister one candy as well?! The child will be OK with that no doubt. Now ask, and what if I give you two candies... (the face will begin to blossom into a big smile before you finish) but only on the condition that your brother gets three candies!?!?

In most cases, but not all, the smile collapses and the child will opt for deal number one where they get one and the sibling gets one. They are willing to forego a 100% raise so long as their brother or sister does not have more. Such is the nature of jealousy!

Even more! Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz pointed out a percentage point difference between two statements of the sages. One insight into human psychology states, "If someone has 100 he wants 200!" Another sagely statement says, "A person does not leave this world having filled half of his desires!" That means he did not get to 50%! The first one says he got to 50%. It may seem like a joke but it's not. What's the answer?

The answer I found very useful when answering a request, a frequent request from one of my daughters. The refrain was, "Can I go to Marshalls and get another pair of shoes?" I realized that she has dozens and dozens of shoes in her closet and yet she still wants more, so I shared with her the seering insight of Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz.

He says that the half that the person does not have is more-dear to him than the half he does have. The shoes in the store are more-dear to you dear than the ones in your closet.

Therefore our sages (Avos 4:1) also remind us, "Who is truly wealthy? One who celebrates what they have!?" Moshe was no doubt more than warning them that they have so very much and all is at risk! ©2018 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

