

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**K**orach was swallowed up by the ground, but his spirit is still alive and well, and in the unlikeliest of places -- British and American universities.

Korach was the embodiment of what the Sages called, argument not for the sake of heaven. They contrasted this with the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who argued for the sake of heaven. (Mishnah Avot 5:17) The difference between them, according to Bartenura, is that argument for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of truth. Argument not for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of victory and power, and they are two very different things.

Korach and his followers came from three different groups. Korach was from the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram came from the tribe of Reuben. And there were 250 leaders from different tribes. Each had a specific grievance. (This is a composite of the views of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.) The 250 leaders resented the fact that leadership roles had been taken from them after the sin of the Golden Calf and given instead to the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram felt aggrieved that their tribe -- descendants of Jacob's firstborn -- had been given no special status. Moses' reply to Korach -- "Now you are trying to get the priesthood too... Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?" -- makes it clear that Korach wanted to be a Kohen, and probably wanted to be Kohen Gadol, High Priest, in place of Aaron.

The three groups had nothing in common except this, that they wanted to be leaders. Each of them wanted a more senior or prestigious position than they currently held. In a word, they wanted power. This was an argument not for the sake of heaven.

The text gives us a clear picture of how the rebels understood leadership. Their claim against Moses and Aaron was "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Later, Datan and Aviram said to Moses, "And now you also want to lord it over us!"

As a general rule: if you want to understand resentments, listen to what people accuse others of, and you will then know what they themselves want. So for example, for many centuries various empires accused Jews of wanting to dominate the world. Jews have never wanted to dominate the world. Unlike

almost any other long-standing civilisation, they never created or sought to create an empire. But the people who levelled this accusation against Jews belonged to empires which were beginning to crumble. They wanted to dominate the world but knew they could not, so they attributed their desire to Jews (in the psychological process known as splitting-and-projection, the single most important phenomenon in understanding antisemitism). (See Vamik Volkan, *The Need to have Enemies and Allies* (1988).) That is when they created antisemitic myths, the classic case being the protocols of the Elders of Zion, invented by writers or propagandists in Czarist Russia during the last stages of its decline.

What the rebels wanted was what they attributed to Moses and Aaron, a form of leadership unknown in the Torah and radically incompatible with the value Moses embodied, namely humility. They wanted to "set themselves above" the Lord's assembly and "lord it over" the people. They wanted power.

What then do you do when you seek not truth but power? You attack not the message but the messenger. You attempt to destroy the standing and credibility of those you oppose. You attempt to de-voice your opponents. That is what Korach and his fellow rebels tried to do.

The explicit way in which they did so was to accuse Moses of setting himself above the congregation, of turning leadership into lordship.

They made other claims, as we can infer from Moses' response. He said, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them," implying that they had accused him of abusing his position for personal gain, misappropriating people's property. He said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea," implying that they had accused him of making up certain instructions or commands, attributing them to God when they were in fact his own idea.

The most egregious instance is the accusation levelled by Datan 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?" This is a forerunner of those concepts of our time: fake news, alternative facts, and post-truth. These were obvious lies, but they knew that if they said them often enough at the right time, someone would believe them.

There was not the slightest attempt to set out

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the real issues: a leadership structure that left simmering discontent among the Levites, Reubenites and other tribal chiefs; a generation that had lost all hope of reaching the promised land; and whatever else was troubling the people. There were real problems, but the rebels were not interested in truth. They wanted power.

Their aim, as far as we can judge from the text, was to discredit Moses, damage his credibility, raise doubts among the people as to whether he really was receiving his instructions from God, and so besmirch his character that he would be unable to lead in the future, or at least be forced to capitulate to the rebels' demands. When you are arguing for the sake of power, truth doesn't come into it at all.

Argument not for the sake of heaven has resurfaced in our time in the form of the "cancel" or "call-out" culture that uses social media to turn people into non-persons when they are deemed to have committed some wrong -- sometimes genuinely so (sexual harassment for example), sometimes merely for going against the moral fashion of the moment. Particularly disturbing has been the growing practice of denying or withdrawing a platform at university to someone whose views are deemed to be offensive to some (often minority) group.

So in March 2020, just before universities were shut down because of the Coronavirus crisis, Oxford University Professor Selina Todd was "no-platformed" by the Oxford International Women's Festival, at which she had been due to speak. A leading scholar of women's lives she had been deemed "transphobic," a charge that she denies. At around the same time the UN Women Oxford UK Society cancelled a talk by former Home Secretary Amber Rudd, an hour before it was due to take place.

In 2019 Cambridge University Divinity School rescinded its offer of a visiting fellowship to Canadian Professor of psychology Jordan Peterson. The Cambridge University Students Union commented, "His work and views are not representative of the student body and as such we do not see his visit as a valuable contribution to the University, but one that works in opposition to the principles of the University." In other words, we don't like what he has to say. All three of these, and other such cases in recent years, are shameful and a betrayal of the principles of the

University.

They are contemporary instances of arguments not for the sake of heaven. They are about abandoning the search for truth in favour of the pursuit of victory and power. They are about discrediting and devoicing -- "cancelling" -- an individual. A university is, or should be, the home of argument for the sake of heaven. It is where we go to participate in the collaborative pursuit of truth. We listen to views opposed to our own. We learn to defend our beliefs. Our understanding deepens, and intellectually, we grow. We learn what it means to care for truth. The pursuit of power has its place, but not where knowledge has its home.

That is why the Sages contrasted Korach and his fellow rebels with the schools of Hillel and Shammai: For three years there was a dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel. The former claimed, 'The law is in agreement with our views,' and the latter insisted, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a Voice from heaven (bat kol) announced, 'These and those are the words of the living God, but the law is in accordance with the school of Hillel.'

Since both 'these and those are the words of the living God', why was the school of Hillel entitled to have the law determined in accordance with their rulings? Because they were kind and modest, they studied both their own rulings and those of the school of Shammai, and they were even so humble as to mention the teachings of the school of Shammai before their own. (Eruvin 13b)

This is a beautiful portrait of the rabbinic ideal: we learn by listening to the views of our opponents, at times even before our own. I believe that what is happening at universities, turning the pursuit of truth into the pursuit of power, demonising and no-platforming those with whom people disagree, is the Korach phenomenon of our time, and very dangerous indeed. An old Latin motto says that to secure justice, *audi alteram partem*, "Listen to the other side." It is through listening to the other side that we walk the path to truth. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"Moses said to Korach: 'Hear me, sons of Levi: Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart [as Levites]... Must you also seek the priesthood?'" (Numbers 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 God—whereas this week's portion of Korach documents two great rebellions against Moses, the first by Korach and the second by Dathan and Abiram. Let us begin with

Korach, 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).

Korach, on the other hand, was the “holy grandfather” who wished to remain close to God in the desert. He was the heir to Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who had brought a “strange fire which God 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 God to sanctify the Sanctuary when God 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).

Korach, 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 God Himself.

Hence the Ibn Ezra maintains that Korach’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). Korach, 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 God 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, Korach’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, Korach was a sinner who did not heed God’s command for the conquest of Israel. God willed us to engage with His world, to work and develop that world, to perfect it and to preserve it (Gen. 2:15). God 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 God 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 as well as a model ethical nation committed to peace without and within.

Immediately before the Revelation at Sinai, we are reminded that the entire world is God’s. He is invested in the world and so must we be. Indeed, Seforno insists that “our being God’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 God. We must be a powerful and exemplary nation-state fulfilling our Zionist mission to be God’s witnesses and a light until the nations from our homeland in Zion. ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**here are always differences within a team regarding the role and efficacy of leadership and leaders. All leaders are subject to criticism and second guessing. It comes with the job and there is no escaping it. Nevertheless, when the criticism descends to the level of personal abuse, and when it is obviously motivated by jealousy and other susceptible causes, then the criticism crosses the line of acceptability and becomes almost slander.

We see in the Torah reading of this week that Korach had criticism of Moses and Aaron regarding their leadership roles. This criticism, as the Torah indicates to us very clearly, stems from personal motives of jealousy, and because Korach was convinced that he and his family were entitled to many

more privileges of leadership than they were given. So, it became a personal vendetta. But no one likes to mount a personal vendetta without having some sort of ulterior super-cause by which to justify it. It was not possible for Korach to say, "I want more power, therefore, give it to me." Instead, he says that Moses and Aaron are lording it over the Jewish people unnecessarily. They have no mandate to do so. All people are holy, and, therefore, everyone is entitled to their say and their share of the privileges of leadership.

This is a populist demand. It is common throughout all human history that the road to obtaining power is to cloak it in some great moral cause. In human history, there have been instances when the moral cause was present. All those rebellions and revolutions were justified and necessary. However, I believe in many instances in human history, it was simply a power grab. People felt they were entitled, and they resented that others had the power. And, for them to gain that power, they would resort to any means possible. We can see that this plays out in our current world as well. During political election campaigns, especially on the national level, it is no longer simply a question of ideas or policies. It has deteriorated into being a question of personalities and the hunger -- the insatiable hunger -- for power.

Moses is taken aback by the ferocity of the attack against him. Moses, who is the most humble of all human beings, who shirked power and begged the Lord to allow someone else to lead the Jewish people, this Moses is deeply wounded and aggrieved by the slanderous accusations against him. He feels that these accusations must be refuted. If Korach, so to speak, escapes unscathed from this incident of an open personal power grab, then he will set a precedent for others in the future. And then Jewish leaders will always be subjected to such vendettas and personal acrimony. So Moses responds, not in order to justify himself, even though he's upset as well. "I have not taken anything from anybody, Moses says, I have not lived at the public troughs, I am not guilty of any corruption, I have been as selfless as I can."

But that is not the issue. The issue is whether an individual can mount an attack on the leadership of the nation based solely on personal desire and political arrogance. And that, Moses feels, must be rejected and refuted in a miraculous and painful way. He asks the Lord to create what had already been created in the six days of creation, the mouth of the earth that would swallow up Korach and his cohorts, and prove once and for all that a person has to be careful to separate noble causes from personal greed and avarice.

This is reinforced when the staff of Aaron blossoms in the tabernacle while the other staffs remain dead wood. Again, Aaron is the last person that can be accused of wanting power or privilege. He is the lover of peace, the gentle arbiter between families and

communities. He is the symbol of godly service and of concern for his fellow human beings. The attack on him is doubly unjustified. It is abundantly clear that Korach is acting out of personal motives. This is a power grab, which has no place in Jewish life, and the Lord, so to speak, performs miracles that prevent it from happening. It should remain a lesson and paradigm for all future generations as well. ©2020 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 AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he 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 feels that within Korach's camp, there were 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's cohorts 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.

Who knows, had Korach and his group agreed to seriously dialogue with Moshe, Moshe may have calmed them down, explaining that their arguments had some merit, not to undo the Kohen – Levi caste system, but to participate in other leadership roles.

Note a deep teaching of Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Ishitza in his Mei Ha-Shiloach. He points out that Korach's children who wrote some of the Psalms are identified as his descendants. In fact, Psalm 49 Lam'natzeach li'vnei Korach is read before the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Had Korach been all evil, these psalms would not have been associated with

his name.

Rabbi Norman Lamm cites Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi who offers an additional idea. He notes that the text in Ethics states a controversy for heaven will in the end – “sofah” – endure. End, or sofah, has two meanings: finish, or purpose, as in “means to an end.”

In other words, when Hillel and Shammai disagreed they still wanted the halachic 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.

The challenge presented in our parsha is to recognize the fine line between dissent that is polarizing, disrespectful, fleeting, and dissent for the sake of heaven, that is uniting, respectful, and enduring. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN**

### **The Test**

**T**he rebellion of Korach and his company, is a difficult event for the B’nei Yisrael. Our Rabbis prove the complexity of the issues at hand with numerous commentaries on the text. The Torah gives us the names of the leaders of this rebellion and some insight into the reasons behind each one’s individual points of contention. The Torah tells us, “and took Korach the son of Yitzhar the son of K’hat the son of Levi together with Datan and Aviram the sons of Eli’av and On the son of Pelet of the sons of R’uvein. And they rose up before Moshe (together with) certain men of the B’nei Yisrael two hundred and fifty princes of the community appointed to the assembly men of renown.” These men were convinced by Korach that Moshe had created his own leadership of the community and had appointed his brother, Aharon, as Kohein Gadol. Korach’s main thrust in his argument was, “you have (taken upon yourself) too much, for the whole community is holy and Hashem is among them, and why do you raise yourself up above the congregation of Hashem?”

Korach stressed that every one of the B’nei Yisrael could have been considered a Kohein since each was holy. Moshe had even prayed for that earlier as his finest wish. Moshe then devised a test for them which would determine the validity of Korach’s argument. “Do this: take your incense burners, Korach and all his company. And put in them fire and lay incense on them before Hashem tomorrow, and it will be the man whom Hashem will choose, you want too much sons of Levi.” Moshe then sent for Datan and Aviram who had left the group only because they were not challenging for the priesthood, yet they were challenging Moshe as leader of the B’nei Yisrael.

Moshe called to them, but their answer was “we will not go up.” Moshe then turned to Korach again but this time he changed the task slightly. “and you will take each man his incense burner and you will place on it incense and you will bring each man his incense burner before Hashem two hundred and fifty incense burners and you and Aharon each his incense burner.”

Why was this the test that Moshe devised? It does not appear that he asked Hashem for a directive as to how Hashem could demonstrate whom He had chosen. Yet Moshe seemed to approach this test with confidence that this would be the definitive test of this rebellion. What is it about the incense burners that was so unique? According to HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the rebellion that Korach led was fueled by his jealousy of Aharon. Not only was Aharon chosen as the Kohein Gadol but only his sons could be the other Kohanim. Korach felt that he himself should be the Kohein Gadol and that he was passed over for this position. Korach was the son of Yitzhar who was also from the line of K’hat. K’hat was the favored of the sons of Levi and the Holy objects were entrusted to K’hat as opposed to K’hat’s brothers even though he was not the firstborn. Even though his family was entrusted with the Holy objects, Korach was not satisfied with this task and wished to be the Kohein Gadol. He also felt that it was Nepotism of Moshe to grant this position to his brother, Aharon. Moshe therefore chose as his test the most important of the Kohein Gadol’s tasks on Yom Kippur. It was the Kohein Gadol alone who was given the responsibility of bringing the incense into the Holy of Holies and presenting it before Hashem. If Korach or any of his followers were also worthy of this task, they would also be able to bring this incense before Hashem. As Korach himself had exclaimed, “they are all holy!” Yet were they all chosen by Hashem for this responsibility?

We need to examine earlier parshiot in the Torah to comprehend this test. In Parashat Sh’mini we find that on the eighth day of the investiture of the Kohanim, we find that the Kohanim were now to begin their service. The Torah tells us, “And Moshe and Aharon came to the Tent of Meeting and they went out and they blessed the nation and the Glory of Hashem appeared to all of the nation.” Hashem sent a fire to light the flames of the altar and it devoured the sacrifices that had been placed on it, and the people saw this and they bowed down to the ground. At this point a strange thing happened. “And the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, took each man his incense burner and placed on it fire and placed on it incense and they offered before Hashem a foreign fire which He did not command them. And there went out a fire from before Hashem and it devoured them and they died before Hashem.”

Moshe knew that if he insisted that Korach and his followers bring incense before Hashem that was not

commanded, they would suffer the same consequence of Nadav and Avihu. The Ramban suggests that this was how Moshe knew that this test would be definitive. The translation of the word k'toret (incense) in the Aramaic translation of Onkelos is always k'toret busmin, or fragrant incense. Only in the cases of both Nadav and Avihu and Korach and his followers do we find that Onkelos translates this only as k'toret without the word busmin. Most Rabbis accept that the formula for the k'toret was the same yet because it was not incense that was required, it was therefore not fragrant. Asking these rebels to bring incense that was not commanded was the equivalent of sentencing them to death. In order to punish one by death, there must be a warning given that transgressing this sin is punishable by death. But there was a warning because the entire congregation saw the death of Nadav and Avihu and understood the punishment. Yet Moshe had still one more problem. He would be asking Aharon to bring the incense when this action was not commanded by Hashem. If Nadav and Avihu, two of only five Kohanim at the time suffered the punishment of death for this transgression, how could Moshe now ask his own brother to bring an uncommanded fire before Hashem? The Ramban answers that Moshe understood that Hashem would acquiesce to this request since it was issued by His obedient messenger on Earth. He quotes the pasuk in Yishayahu, "He confirms the word of His servant and performs the counsel of His messengers."

Each of us has a task in life. Being jealous of someone else's role is misunderstanding the importance of our particular task. Hashem has placed us with our own starting point in life, and it is our task to grow and improve from there. May we each seek to discover our task, and may we grow to fulfill our purpose in Hashem's plans. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Guarding the Temple

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**G**-d told Aharon, "Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the Tent of Meeting" (*Bamidbar* 18:2). What will you be doing there? You will be guarding the Temple. But why would G-d's Temple require guards? This "guarding" was to show the proper respect due to the Temple. In fact, this guard duty was considered one of the sacred services performed by the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, and the *Kohanim* wore their priestly garments when they carried it out. (They would change out of the garments when sleeping between shifts, as it was forbidden to sleep while wearing them.) Since guard duty was considered a priestly service, some say that children could not take part in it, and that the watchmen had to be twenty or older. Even at the age of twenty, *Kohanim* and *Leviim*

were not authorized to perform all the services, but they were permitted to do this.

Because guard duty was a type of divine service, it should have been performed while standing. However, because it was for an extended period of time, the watchmen were permitted to sit when they were tired (though not to sleep, of course). In general, sitting in the courtyard of the Temple was not allowed, but in this case it was allowed as it was to enable the proper guarding of the Temple.

There is a disagreement as to the extent of the guarding. The Rambam says it was done at night only. However, according to some commentaries on *Mishnah Tamid*, the guarding was done around the clock. Others distinguish between the different places that were guarded saying that some areas were guarded around the clock, while others were guarded only part of the time. Within this opinion, there is a disagreement about whether the part-time guarding was during the day or night. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"A**nd Hashem spoke to Aharon "And I, behold, I have given you charge over My gifts..." (Bamidbar 18:8) After the story of Korach's attempted coup of the Kehuna, the Torah moves on to the 'matnos kehuna,' the gifts that were to be given by the Jews to Kohanim. These gifts include a portion of various sacrifices, first fruits, first-born animals, challah, choice portions of any animal that is slaughtered, and more.

Rashi explains why this portion was first mentioned here, after the story of Korach. Chazal compare it to a king who gave a gift of land to a friend. He neither recorded it nor wrote a deed. However, when someone came and tried to take it away, the king put a stop to it. He then wrote up a deed and recorded the gift in court so none could argue about it in the future. Korach tried to take away what Hashem had given Aharon, and Hashem not only put a stop to it, but ensured that it would not be possible for anyone else to attempt it.

This is a very important lesson for all of us. It teaches us that Hashem's plan cannot be swayed or deterred by the schemes of others. Even if they try to take things away from us, Hashem will prevent them from doing so. And if they succeed? That only means that Hashem wanted it that way and gave it to them. We should not get upset because Hashem has already guaranteed that we will get what He wants us to have.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that the gifts that come to us are not just freebies. The Sforno comments that this is a reciprocal relationship. Because the Kohanim accept responsibility for guarding the "holy," being not just the physical items of the Mishkan but its conduct and practices, they therefore are

granted the gifts mentioned in this parsha.

Similarly, the gifts Hashem gives each of us come with a code of conduct that He expects of us. He gives us opportunities to "earn" what He gives us (though of course it is all Hashem's benevolence which enables us to make those attempts and all He gives us is because of His kindness) and it is up to us to make the most of them.

When we become fearful that others may take away what is ours, we are faltering in our responsibilities to Him, and may have reason to worry. However, if we are committed to doing our part and fulfilling what Hashem wants from us, then we have nothing to fear from anyone else.

*A man came to his Rebbe to discuss a problem he had. He had a very bad temper and was looking for ways to tame it. The Rebbe told him to wait as he met with another fellow first. When the other man came into the Rebbe's room, they spoke a few moments. Then, the Rebbe said, loudly: "I have a favor to ask you. The man who let you in ahead of him is coming into me soon. When you go out, try to make him angry."*

*When the man came out, he clumsily bumped into the first fellow. Instead of getting upset, the man smiled and said, "It's all from Hashem." The second fellow got a cup of tea and on his way back "accidentally" sloshed the hot beverage on the first man. Again, he calmly replied that everything is from Hashem.*

*When the man went into the Rebbe to discuss his temper, the Rebbe said, "I saw how someone bumped into you and you were calm." Sheepishly the man grinned. "Rebbe, that was only because I overheard you. I knew it was the Rebbe's plan to get me angry so it didn't bother me."*

*"Aha!" said the Rebbe. "And all these things that make you angry are part of Hashem's plan. Since you know He's just trying to get you upset, you should be able to brush off what others do and remain calm."*

*As heard from R' Elimelech Biderman h/t Henny Ein © 2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### **RABBI AHARON LOPIANSKY**

## **TorahWeb**

**A**t first glance, Korach could be written off as just another troublemaker, a minor politician clamoring for an underserved office. And yet, the use of the Divine service -- and especially the ketores -- as the tool to rid ourselves of him, and the extraordinary miracles associated with his undoing, clearly point to a much greater assault on Yiddishkeit than merely another disgruntled office-seeker.

The Rambam (in Peirush Hamishnayos -- hakdama to perek Chelek) indicates that Korach's assault was on the veracity of the Torah transmission of Moshe. He insinuated that the directive to appoint Aharon to be the kohein gadol was Moshe's own

design, not Hashem's directive. This therefore made the entire Torah suspect and as such could potentially destroy all of Torah and Yiddishkeit.

Taking a closer look at Chazal, we find that Korach is guilty of another fundamentally flawed perception of the spiritual world of Torah, which is in effect a total eradication of our understanding of Torah and Mitzvos. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 3) tell us that Korach mocked Moshe, asking him, "does a garment that is completely techeiles need tzitzis?", to which Moshe of course replied in the affirmative. Korach then mocked, "if a solitary thread of techeiles is enough to fulfill the mitzvah, isn't an entire garment of techeiles enough?" Korach continued, "does a house filled with sifrei Torah need a mezuzah?", to which Moshe replied, "of course." Once again Korach mocked him, "if two paragraphs of Torah are enough to fulfill the obligation of mezuzah, surely an entire house of seforim is good enough!?"

These arguments are powerful. They fall under the category of "reductio ad absurdum", reducing your opponent's argument to a place of ridicule. What, then, was Moshe's counterpoint? The answer is that Korach's position and argumentation was based on a perception of the spiritual world that was severely flawed. He understood the spiritual world as a finite set of "good" that could be totally obtained by one's efforts. Thus once the "garment" is all techeiles and the house is full of seforim, there is no point in doing anything else, just as a person who works hard exclusively in order to afford a home would find it pointless to work further once he has acquired that home.

But that is a very crass perception of the spiritual world, which sees it as one in which one acquires "things", similar to the physical world. The reality, however, is that the spiritual world is a road leading a person to Hashem. Just as Hashem is infinite, so is the road leading to Him, so to speak. The spiritual is not a specific finite acquisition or set of acquisitions, but a road that continuously leading a person towards Hashem. As soon as a person has progressed down the road, another segment of the road opens up, and then still another segment, and so on ad infinitum. Thus each mitzvah is but a "thread" that leads the person to the beyond; a gateway that opens to another palace, and when one has woven an entire garment of this techeiles, and filled an entire room with seforim, there is a thread that leads him still further, and a door that opens to another room, and so on.

This misconception about the spiritual world is what led Korach to dispute the kehunah in the first place. Chazal say that the reason why it is not common for talmedei chachomim to have children who are talmedei chachomim is in order that people not feel that "Torah" is inherited. For physical entities are always inherited; they are "things" and become the owner's eternally. Not so the world of the spirit. One can have

an affinity for ruchniyos but it never becomes anyone's personal possession. Thus Korach's very demand that the kehunah is his disqualified him from that position!  
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### 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 (AleI 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 -- 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The 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*

