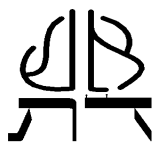


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Our Parsha is dominated by the rebellion organized by Korach, and the issues that stemmed from it (i.e. proving that Moshe, Aharon and the Tribe of Levi were chosen by G-d, and what their roles and obligations were). Our sages tell us that Korach denied the uniqueness of Moshe's prophecy, and claimed that many of the instructions were initiated by him. Korach claimed that G-d went along with these commandments in deference to Moshe's asking that He do so, rather than G-d having commanded them to Moshe, who- as the faithful servant- relayed them to the Children of Israel. We would therefore expect that any accusations that Korach made would bolster his argument. However, one of the issues that Korach raised does not seem to fall into this category.

After Korach makes his claim (Bamidbar 16:3), the Torah says that "Moshe heard, and he threw himself on his face" (16:4). The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) tells us what Moshe heard that caused this reaction: "Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmaini said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan 'that they suspected him of [committing] adultery, as it says (Tehillim 106:16) 'and they angered/were jealous of Moshe in the encampment.' Rabbi Shmuel the son of Yitzchok says, 'this teaches us that each one warned his wife not to become secluded with Moshe, as it says (Shemos 33:7) 'and Moshe took his tent and pitched it outside of the encampment.'" When a husband suspects that his wife is seeing another man, the Torah (Bamidbar 5:11-31) describes the "Sotah" process, including having the husband, in front of witnesses, warn his wife not to become secluded with that person. If she subsequently does anyway, they then go to the Temple where she will drink the "Sotah" waters. This warning is called "kinuy," the same root as "anger/jealousy" used in the verse in Tehillim. It can therefore be read as, "and they did 'kinuy' regarding Moshe in the encampment," i.e. they warned their wives not to become secluded with him.

The obvious question, asked by the

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commentators, is how Korach (and his followers) could make such an outrageous claim. Besides the ridiculousness of the accusation itself, logistically it doesn't make sense. The Torah testifies that "his aid, Yehoshua- the young lad- never moved from within the tent" (Shemos 33:11), precluding any possibility of this accusation having any legitimacy. The nation had recently waited 7 days for Miriam's skin to heal (Bamidbar 12:14-16) after she had accused Moshe of wrongfully separating from his wife. If G-d testified that Moshe's level was so great that this separation was warranted, how could Korach claim that Moshe was guilty of adultery? There are other questions to be answered as well, but the mere accusation itself seems rather preposterous.

It also seems unbelievable that Korach would undermine the credibility of his "position" by stooping to such charges. Although his argument that a completely blue garment shouldn't need a blue thread was wrong, we can at least understand why some would believe it. But if Korach was trying to garner support for his rebellion, making such outlandish accusations against the "Father of all Prophets" would be counterproductive, as it would decrease the believability of his questioning of Moshe's prophecy. Why would Korach risk his credibility by making such an accusation?

Additionally, the verse that the Talmud brings as a proof-text that the men had warned their wives against becoming secluded with Moshe is from immediately after he had attained G-d's forgiveness for the sin of the "golden calf." This occurred almost six months before the Mishkan (portable Temple) was built, while Korach's rebellion occurred after the nation had already traveled- and they didn't even start traveling until over a month and a half after the it was built. How could this verse be brought to prove that Moshe had heard Korach's accusations if he had already moved his tent months earlier?

One could answer that Moshe did move his tent earlier, but because anybody that wanted to speak with him- including women- had to leave the encampment to get there, it was part of the cause of the accusation- rather than being the result of it. However, Rashi (Sanhedrin 110a) says that "he went outside the encampment so that they would no longer suspect him," meaning that he had already been accused- and knew about the accusations- months before Korach's rebellion. If so, why does the Torah indicate (according

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to the way the Talmud explains it) that Moshe first heard about these accusations now?

The Maharsha (Bava Kama 16b and Sanhedrin 110a) explains that the "laitzanay hador," the scoffers of the generation, could not believe that any human could separate from his wife for that long, so they accused Moshe of cheating on her. This may explain how some may have thought such things, but Korach and his followers are described as being brighter than that. It seems incredulous that they could seriously think that Moshe was guilty of such a thing, or that saying so would enhance their chances of success. (It also doesn't deal with the timing of Moshe's move.)

The Margolios Hayam (Sanhedrin 110a) brings an approach that the suspicions started when the women didn't listen to their husbands' requests that they give their jewelry for the "golden calf." After that, they were concerned that their wives would be more beholden to Moshe than to them, so they warned them not to become secluded with him. While this would explain the move coming so early, it does not explain why the Torah implies that Moshe first heard about these accusations now. It also seems a bit far-fetched that not giving their jewelry for idol worship would lead to such a serious warning.

However, if we synthesize these two answers, and add a bit more onto them, we may be able to come up with an approach that would explain what might have happened. After the women refused to give their jewelry, the men did feel a bit jealous. They may not have accused Moshe of doing anything, but there was some tension (both with Moshe and within the home). There may have even been some accusations made directly to the wives that they listen to Moshe rather than to them, but nothing more serious than that. Moshe sensed this, and in order to ease this tension, moved out of the area. Not because of any suspicions of adultery, but suspicions of having more sway than the

husbands. This feeling grew stronger, though, when Moshe asked for contributions for the Mishkan and the women were so eager to contribute (see Rashi on Shemos 35:22). When they had asked their wives for jewelry they refused, but when Moshe asked, there was no hesitation.

Against this backdrop of the men being concerned about Moshe having more influence over their wives than they do comes the revelation that Moshe has separated from his wife. No one could seriously think that anything was going on other than Moshe being on that much higher a level than everyone else- except for the scoffers, who claimed that Moshe must be seeing another woman. This was the situation when Korach decided to rebel against Moshe. It was not the reason for his rebellion, but Korach would still use it to his advantage.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) tells us that Korach's wife got him started on this rebellion, getting him jealous of Moshe, Aharon and Eltzafan ben Uziel. It also informs us (109b) that although Ohn ben Peles is mentioned initially as part of the rebellion, his name isn't mentioned again, as his wife convinced him to drop out. Moreover, we see that Moshe did whatever he could to end the rebellion amicably, visiting Korach and trying to visit Dasan and Avirum. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a, see Rashi on Bamidbar 16:12) even learns from here that "one should not continue a dispute, as Moshe was efforting to smooth things out with peaceful words."

Korach therefore realized that Moshe would do what he could to cause the rebellion to be calmed, including speaking to the wives of those rebelling in an effort to convince them to convince their husbands that they shouldn't rebel. In order to prevent Moshe from meeting with the wives, he had the husbands do "kinuy" on their wives, thus preventing them from meeting with Moshe privately. (And even though technically they could still meet if someone else were present- i.e. Tzipora or Yehoshua- after having been warned not to become secluded with Moshe they couldn't have felt too comfortable meeting with him in any manner.)

If there was not already tension between the husbands and wives regarding Moshe, or had there not been "rumors" started by those scoffers, Korach wouldn't have been able to get away with asking the husbands to forbid their wives to be with Moshe. However, because these tensions did exist, and the disgraceful rumors were there (even though no one really believed them), it didn't seem so outlandish for the husbands to give their wives such a warning. And although the only ones who really suspected Moshe of anything were the scoffers, giving the warning itself had the implication that they had their suspicions as well-even if they really didn't.

We can now understand why Korach could have made such an outrageous accusation (by implication) and how he used it to further his rebellion. And despite Moshe's attempts to end it peacefully, it

came down to G-d Himself showing that "Moshe is true and his Torah is true." © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Korah the son of Yitzhar the son of Kehat the son of Levi and Datan and Aviram the sons of Eliav and On son of Pelet the sons of Reuven rose up before Moses.. And they gathered against Moses..." (Numbers 16:1-3).

What was the precise content of the rebellion of Korah and his cohorts against Moses? Rashi (ad loc) cites a midrash which defines the rebels' claim and at the same time connects our Torah portion with the conclusion of last week's reading, the segment which deals with the ritual fringes: "Behold (said Korah, Datan and Aviram), I argue against (Moses) and nullify (by means of logic) his words (of Torah)... What did they (these rebels) do? They stood up and assembled 250 heads of court, mainly from the tribe of Reuven and clothed them in garments which were completely colored royal blue (tehelet). They came and stood before Moses. They said to him: is a garment which is wholly royal blue obligated to have ritual fringes or not? Moses said to them, 'Such a garment is obligated.' They began to mock him, Is it possible that a garment of another color be freed from the obligation of ritual fringes with but one fringe of royal blue, and this garment, which is wholly royal blue, not be freed of the obligation?..'

Korah and his cohorts were scoffing at Moses' message of Torah on the basis of analytical logic, a logic which threatened to destroy the very premise of the commandments. Were they justified in their argument?

In order to understand the proper response to their claim, let us examine an interesting custom surrounding the commandment of the ritual fringes. Apparently, there was an old custom in the land of Israel to touch one's ritual fringes during the recitation of the Shema each morning, to hold them in one's hands, to pass them over one's eyes, and to kiss them. The tenth century Babylonian scholars, Rav Hai Gaon and Rav Natronai Gaon, attempted to uproot this custom, arguing: "why handle the ritual fringes at all after one looked at them at the time of putting them on, and made a blessing over them? When we reach "you shall bind them.." in the recitation of the Shema, do we then have to touch the tefilin (phylacteries)? When we reach "You shall write them..", must we then go home and place our hands on the mezuzah..?" And in Orhot Haim (Part 1, Page 3) Moshe Gaon is cited as saying, "one who does such things (with the ritual fringes) must be taught and adjured not to do them any more..."

Nevertheless, not only did the custom refuse to fall into oblivion, but it even became more pronounced in succeeding generations. The Sixteenth Century

Shulhan Arukh (Set Table) codifies: "There is a commandment (sic) to grasp the ritual fringes in the left hand corresponding to the heart at the time of the recitation of the Shema, an action suggested by the Biblical words, 'these words shall be placed upon your heart.' There are those who follow the custom of looking at the ritual fringes when they reach the words, 'You shall look upon them' and to pass them over their eyes. This is a worthy custom and expresses love for the commandments." (Orah Haim 24, 2-4).

Rav Moshe Isserles adds: "There are also some who follow the custom to kiss the ritual fringes when they gaze upon them, and all of this demonstrates love for the commandments." (See Magen Avraham, Be'er Hetev and Mishna Brurah ad loc, who all concur).

Why is the commandment of ritual fringes singled out from all of the others to be fondled and kissed-and this, despite Gaonic condemnation of the practice?

For insight, let us review a most novel and striking interpretation of the "sin of the scouts" offered by my rebbe and mentor, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik ztz"l, in response to a problematic opening of last week's portion of Shelach: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying 'Send forth for yourselves men who will scout out (lit. tour) the Land of Canaan..' (Numbers 13:1, 2).

Why would G-d possibly suggest a reconnaissance mission to look over the land, to decide whether or not its conquest would be a realistic achievement? Why place Divine will into the hands of a "committee"?

The Rav maintains that the verb *latur* does not mean to "scout out" in terms of "to evaluate", but rather "to seek out with passion," just as the end of the Torah reading uses the same verb—in the context of the commandment of ritual fringes—to instruct that we not "seek out with passion after the stirring of "our hearts and our eyes" (Numbers 15:40). Hence the Rav Soloveitchik insists that just as our Talmudic Sages enjoin that an individual dare not become engaged without first "seeing with passion" his/her spouse-to-be, so the Almighty wanted a mission of Israelites to bring back a verbal picture of the land to inspire the nation with passionate zeal for the conquest which lay ahead. Tragically, Moses did not properly understand the Divine word of instruction, dispatched an investigative reconnaissance mission, and forestalled redemption for thousands of years...

The land of Israel and the Torah of Israel are both Biblically called *morasha* (Exodus 6:8, Deuteronomy 33:4), a word which literally means heritage but which the Sages of the Talmud link to "me'orasa," (eros, love), or fiancée'. A successful marriage, a proper conquest of and inhabitation in the land of Israel, the knowledge and performance of Torah are each fraught with unsuspected road-blocks and tantalizing temptations along the way; only the passion

of love which defies logic, romance which supersedes reason, can provide one with the requisite strength to overcome all obstacles in pursuit of these worthwhile and critical goals.

In the novel *Remember Me to G-d* by Myron Kaufman, an assimilated German-Jewish patriarch is unsuccessfully attempting to dissuade his son at Harvard from marrying a Radcliffe gentile. "But you never taught me to love Judaism," remonstrates the son. "Why should I not embrace the Christian woman?"

In the commandment of ritual fringes, the white represents clear logic while the royal blue is reminiscent of the eternal mystery of sea and sky, the blue-white sapphire visible at the mystical moment of glimpsing the Divine (Exodus 24:10,11). The sin of the scouts and the command of the ritual fringes—united by a verb which means passionate love—come to teach that there must be an emotion which supersedes intellect, a love which overcomes logic, in the realms of Torah and Israel. And Torah must be passionately pursued if the commandments will prove more powerful than other sensuous seductions. Hence the ritual fringes, reminding us of beloved commandments which come from heaven, must be fondled by our left hand (corresponding to the heart) and kissed by our mouths. Only a beloved and passionate fruitful Torah has the capacity to overcome a bald and arid, cold and dry logical Korah. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The story of Korach's rebellion contains echoes of the golden calf narrative. Each involves insurrection. In the golden calf episode, the Jews aspire to replace Moshe (Moses). (Exodus 32:1) In the Korach story, Aharon's (Aaron) priesthood is also challenged. (Numbers 16:10)

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

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

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

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

Moshe, on the other hand is far more aggressive. Without a prior command from God, he shatters the tablets in reaction to the golden calf. (Exodus 32:19) In the Korach episode, Moshe acts similarly. Without a word from God, Moshe declares that the earth would open up and swallow Korach and his cohorts. The earth does just that. (Numbers 16:30-32)

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

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

From my perspective, it would seem that since both approaches are found in the Torah, we learn that each has value. It can be argued that both of these tactics strengthen the other - both quiet diplomacy and public protest yield results. On the one hand, you need those on the inside, working within the organized system to effect change. On the other hand, it is public protest that is the fuel that allows quiet diplomacy to work. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

*by Rabbi Dr Jeffrey M Cohen,
Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue*

We read this morning the episode describing the rebellion of Korach against the leadership of Moses. In spite of all the miracles that had been performed by G-d through Moses, Korach disseminated the philosophy that Moses and Aaron were not essential to the Divine plan.

We can well imagine what he told the masses, "Who appointed Moses as leader over us? Not us. Not G-d. Remember how he just appeared, out of the blue, in Egypt, to assume leadership of the nation, and how he appointed his own brother to be priest. What nepotism! The truth is that anyone can assume leadership of Israel because we are, as a nation, a Kingdom of Priests— a description of us used by G-d Himself! So, vote for me, and I'll show you real

leadership, I'll solve all your problems and take you speedily into the Promised Land."

The Midrash, latching upon the connection between this week's sidra and the portion dealing with tzitzit at the end of last week's sidra, elucidates Korach's position by positing a halachic debate between Korach and Moses. Basing himself on the verse Venatnu al tzitzit hakanaf p'til, t'chelet, "They shall place on the corner fringes of their robes a thread of blue," Korach asks Moses whether a tallit made up entirely of blue wool still requires a thread of blue to be attached to its corners. When Moses answered that it does, Korach mocked his logic. Again, Korach posed the question about the mezuzah, which contains a couple of Biblical portions from the Shema inside it. "What," asked Korach, "if you have a house that is chock-a-block full of holy books and Bibles which contain the Shema over and over again. Does that house still require a mezuzah?" Again, Korach laughed in derision when Moses replied in the affirmative.

This Midrash is conveying here the precise psychological state of Korach's mind. For him, the house full of holy books or the garment entirely of ritualistic blue wool could not possibly require an additional holy symbol. Hence a community like Israel, invested with holiness by proximity with G-d himself, could not possibly need a pair of holy leaders to run its affairs.

But Korach was wrong. A house full of books still requires a mezuzah. The library represents only potential knowledge. It has the potential to instil learning and creativity, but will only do so if the books are taken out, read and used as a conduit for intellectual and spiritual growth. The mezuzah being driven into the doorpost symbolises the affixing of the potential knowledge, contained in the holy book, into the minds and emotions of the readers and the transmutation of potential into actual knowledge. Similarly, the robe made entirely of blue wool remains an ordinary robe until a distinctive symbolic thread of tzitzit is attached to transform it into a religious garment, a veritable priestly vestment.

And this was the essence of Moses' rebuttal of Korach, namely that potentiality, whether in the sphere of holiness or leadership, still requires to be nurtured under expert supervision. Without that, it will atrophy and die. And it was Moses and Aaron who had been selected for just such a task, while Korach had been overlooked. Indeed, the very names of the respective protagonists in this clash reflect their opposing approach.

Moshe means "one who draws out [the potential of his people];" Aharon means "enlightener," from the word uhr or ohr. Moses and Aaron were committed, from birth, towards augmenting the spirituality of the nation. Korach, on the other hand, is from the noun keire'ach, meaning "baldness."

He was committed to frustrating the growth and development of the nation. Korach's notion, that holiness is intrinsic, and does not require to be worked at, sacrificed for, and nurtured by expert guides, is quite fallacious. It certainly does not thrive on concession, compromise or neglect. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITALSHLIT"A

Various explanations have been offered for Korach's rebellion—where exactly his mistake lay; how he dared to speak out against Moshe, the most humble of men, claiming that Moshe was elevating himself, etc. Rashi, for example, writes (16:7), "Korach was clever. Why did he perform this foolish act? His eye led him astray. He saw a great dynasty that would rise up from him (Korach) -- the prophet Shemuel, who was compared to Moshe and Aharon..." But all of the explanations offered are only partial solutions, since they fail to explain one thing: Moshe informed Korach and his gang that if it turned out that he (Moshe) was right, and that God had chosen him and Aharon, then Korach's whole congregation would die (Rashi 16:6). How, then, could Korach and his followers not have given up their fight? All the various explanations can perhaps explain the creation of the rebellion in its early stages, but it is difficult to believe that any of these reasons so convinced Korach and his men of their own case that even the threat of death had no effect on them.

The reason for this is simple: dispute and a disputational bent can bring about a situation in which a person loses all sense of logic and clear-headedness. He can believe in his argument so strongly that neither reasoning nor any threat will budge him. As an argument becomes more and more heated, a person believes with increasing intensity that he is correct that everyone else is wrong. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 6b) explains the verse in Mishlei (14:14), "Before it flares up the fight is abandoned," as follows: "Before the argument flares up, you are still able to abandon it. Once it flares up, you are unable to abandon it."

Yaakov declared on his deathbed: "Shimon and Levi are brothers; swords are their instruments of cruelty. Let my soul not enter their counsel; let my honor not be attached to their assembly, for they killed a man in their anger..." (Bereishit 49:5-6). Rashi connects the words "Let my honor not be attached to their assembly" with Korach's rebellion, according to which Yaakov links the rebellion to the slaying of the men of Shekhem by Shimon and Levi. Dispute can bring a person to such a loss of clear-headedness that he becomes capable of killing someone who thinks differently from him. The Gemara (Chullin 89a) explains the verse from Iyov

(26:7), "He hangs the earth upon nothingness (belima)" as teaching that "The world exists only for the sake of one who restrains himself (bolem et atzmo) during a dispute."

The Mishna in Avot (5:17) teaches, "Any dispute which is conducted for the sake of Heaven is destined to last, and one which is not for the sake of Heaven will not last. Which dispute was for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between (the schools of) Hillel and Shamai. Which was not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his congregation."

When there is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven, one may reach a situation of heated argument, creating great animosity and hatred between two groups, to the extent that even the reason for the dispute is forgotten. After a few years, when those concerned think back on it they discover that the entire dispute revolved around a childish and unimportant matter, and they cannot understand what all the fuss was about for all that time. The dispute between Hillel and Shamai is an example of a genuine dispute, with each side listening to the other and not losing a sense of logic because of the argument. This is a dispute for the sake of Heaven, which lasts for a long time.

Korach's dispute thus remains the paradigm of a dispute which is not for the sake of Heaven. This rebellion even has halakhic ramifications which are relevant for all generations. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 2a) warns, "Anyone who maintains a dispute transgresses a negative commandment, as it is written, 'And he shall not be like Korach and his congregation' (Bamidbar 17:5)." (Originally delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Korach 5756 [1996].)

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The disaster that befell the Jewish people in the desert and that doomed the generation that had left Egypt and stood at Sinai had many causes. But to me, the most blatant cause was that Moshe somehow picked the wrong men to be the spies that would report on the Land of Israel. They were, in the words of the Torah and Rashi's commentary to those words, great men, leaders of Israel, people of piety and belief. Moshe was supremely confident that they would be enthusiastic about the blessings of living in the land of Israel. Yet, with the exceptions of Calev and Yehoshua, these leaders got the facts right and the conclusions all wrong.

The rabbis of the Midrash indicate that they had a personal agenda that drove them, perhaps existing even only subconsciously within them - that they were afraid of losing their leadership roles to younger people of the next generation when the Jews would enter the Land of Israel. But I feel that one can see a deeper reason and psychological insight as well. The Land of Israel has always been a difficult test for Jews. It is

much easier to deal with an imaginary place - a Holy Land - where everything will be perfect and satisfying than to be forced to contend with a real place where life is far from perfect and where ideals are difficult to realize. The spies were disappointed in what they saw, in the reality of the land as compared to their imaginary perfect home and this disparity depressed them and colored their report to the rest of their compatriots. The Jerusalem on this earth never quite matches up with the heavenly Jerusalem of our dreams. And the inability to deal with this truth became a main cause of tragedy for the ten spies and for those who believed in them.

Calev and Yehoshua were not discouraged by the reality of the land as they saw it. They said: "aloh naaleh" - we will go up, we will improve the situation, and we will not forsake our dreams and ideals because of the difficulties that the land poses. We will make it better and be able to succeed. Living in Israel as I do, I often hear, especially from those Jews who still reside in the Diaspora - many of them pious, observant, fine people, comments about the imperfections of our state and of its populace. It almost seems to serve as an excuse to remain in the desert and not to come to Israel because of the difficulties involved. I make no excuses for the failings in Israeli life, be they religious, educational, social or economic. Nevertheless, one need only look at the achievements that have been wrought here over the past century of Jewish life in order to be heartened.

The Land of Israel poses now, as it always has, a severe test of Jewish faith, loyalty and commitment. What is necessary is for all of us to possess the optimism and fortitude of Calev and Yehoshua in viewing the Land of Israel and the Jewish community residing therein. We will certainly go up, we will improve, and we will strive to fulfill our goal and ideal of being a special people living in a special land. In so doing, we will realize the goal of a holy people residing in a holy land. © 2004 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/jewishhistory.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

In this parsha we learn about the rebellion against Moses' leadership led by Korach, and God's punishing response. The following verse is part of Moses' reaction to God's wrath after Korach's accusations.

It might be advisable to see the verse inside in order to fully appreciate Rashi's comment, which is based on a subtle grammatical point.

"And they fell on their faces and they said: God, God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and You be angry with the entire assembly?" (Numbers 16:22)

"One man etc.'—Rashi: He is the sinner. And will You be angry with the whole assembly?"

A Question: What is Rashi responding to here? What has he added to our understanding? In short: What's bothering him?

This is very difficult. But give it a try. Some have suggested that Rashi is responding to the future tense of the word "yecheta" which literally means "he will sin." In our verse this would mean: "If one man will sin (in the future) will You be angry with the whole assembly?"

According to this suggested answer Rashi is telling us, by using the present "he is the sinner"—that this word should be understood as in the present tense.

This could certainly be so, because in Biblical Hebrew the tenses do not always follow strict time categories. We frequently have future verbs meaning present and present verbs meaning future (see Rashi on Genesis 29:3).

According to these commentators, Rashi is helping us avoid a misunderstanding. Had the word been taken literally, in the future tense, then the meaning would be "If a man will sin (in the future), will You then be angry with the whole assembly?"

But it is not likely that Rashi's intention is to guide against such an interpretation. Why would you say that this cannot be Rashi's intention? Common sense should tell us that this is not what is bothering him. Why?

An Answer: It is not reasonable to think that God would punish anyone, let alone the whole, innocent, assembly, for a sin that a man may commit in the future! Why would anyone ever think that God would punish even the would-be sinner himself for a transgression he has not yet committed? Considering the unreasonableness of such an assumption, we can be sure that Rashi's comment is not meant to warn us against accepting such an unlikely interpretation.

Another reason not to accept such an understanding of Rashi's comment is that the "dibbur hamaschil" (initiating words to Rashi's commentary) leaves out the crucial word "yecheta." If Rashi's main point were to correct our understanding of this word, we would expect it to be in the heading of the comment.

What then might be bothering Rashi? Hint: The answer depends on a little known grammatical rule.

An Answer: Some background information is necessary. In Biblical Hebrew the letter "heh," when it precedes a word, can have two different functions: (1) It can mean "the"—before the definite article, for example, "haSefer" "the book." (2) It can mean a question (like a "?" in English). Like "Hashomer achi anochi?" "Am I my brother's keeper?"

One can usually tell the difference between these two meanings by the vowel under the letter "heh." When intended as a question, it usually has a "chataf patach" (a patach with a sheva at the side), whereas when it is intended as a definite article, it has a plain patach.

But, alas, as with all grammar rules, this too has its exceptions. Suffice it to say that before a word that begins with an "alef" the rule is different. Before an "alef" a patach is used for a question and a kametz for a definite article (as in "ha'aretz"—"the Land"). (This is difficult to convey in transliteration.)

Now as we look at our verse we can see what is bothering Rashi. At first glance the verse seems to say: "If one man sins, will You be angry with the whole assembly?" (This is similar to the common [incorrect] translation above.) But if this were the correct meaning, then we should have a "heh hashailah" ("questioning heh") before the word "ish" (man) and its vowel should be a patach, because this word begins with an "alef." But, lo and behold, its vowel is a kametz. So it cannot be a question; it must be a regular "heh" which comes before a definite article ("the one man"). Thus, Rashi is forced to break the verse into two parts: "He is the sinner ("the one man") -- will You, then, be angry with the whole assembly?"

The question, you see, begins only with the second half of the verse—and here, ironically, there is no "heh hashailah" at all. Rashi's sensitivity to exact grammatical rules is evident. And his subtle corrective commentary saves the day.

But, we should ask why did Moses himself not ask "If a man sins, will You be angry with the whole assembly?" An Answer: Because Moses is not asking a hypothetical question—"if a man sins..." He knows full well that one man did sin—Korach—and he must be punished. Moses' question of God was: One man sinned, (granted) but will You be angry with the whole assembly?" © 2004 Dr. A. Bonchek and Aish Hatorah

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Korach, we find Korach complaining about being overlooked for a priestly position. Rashi explains that Korach had a whole theory as to why he should have been the next priest. If you look at the words of the Torah, though, one thing doesn't fit. It says that Korach 'took' himself, along with his 250 followers, and complained (16:1). What is the significance of that term?

Onkelus translates 'took' to mean 'separated', which is what Korach did to himself by arguing - he separated himself from the Jewish community. Rav Salant explains this on an even deeper level. He says that although Korach sinned, he was still rewarded with having Shmuel (Samuel) as a descendant, because through this argument, and because he was punished with eternal hell, many people were stirred to do Teshuva (repent) for their sins. So in a strange way some good came out of this. BUT...the Torah tells us that he still separated himself from society, and the Torah way. It may have helped a select few, but he still

distanced himself from the way things should be done, and for that he was punished.

It's important for us to realize that there are many ways to accomplish goals, especially those spiritual in nature. The Torah is telling us that doing things your own way can be dangerous. Not impossible, and not wrong, but if we separate too much from society, it can potentially be dangerous. Should we blaze our own trail if someone took the time and effort to pave a road to reach the very same goal? May we all identify our own personal goals, and learn to reach them together! © 2004 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Until this week's Torah portion, the contributions of Bnei Yisrael were all given exclusively to the Almighty. This is true, for example, with respect to the firstborns, "Give every firstborn to G-d" [Shemot 13:12]. With respect to bikurim, it is written, "You shall bring the first fruits of your land to the House of your G-d" [23:19]. The same is true for maaser and confiscated material, "Everything that a man dedicates to G-d... is consecrated to G-d... And every tithe from the land... will be holy to G-d" [Vayikra 27:28-30].

In this week's portion, there is a change. After the tragic end of the affair of Korach, Bnei Yisrael come to Moshe with a complaint: "Behold, we are dying, we are all lost. Anybody who approaches the Tabernacle of G-d will die, have we stopped dying?" [Bamidbar 17:27-28]. G-d answers that from that point on the responsibility for this matter, approaching the holiest site, will be given to the Kohanim, with the help of the Levites: "And G-d said to Aharon, You and your sons, together with the house of your fathers, will carry the sins of the Temple... Also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, should come close to you and join you, and serve you... You shall guard the responsibility of the Temple and the responsibility of the Altar, and let there no longer be anger with Bnei Yisrael." [18:1-5].

In return for their role, the Kohanim will receive the gifts donated by Bnei Yisrael. "And, behold, I have given you the safeguard of my teruma... I have given it to you as a gift, and to your sons, as a permanent portion." [18:8]. The Teruma is a reward for the Kohanim, who guard over the element of holiness. And they will be given other gifts in the future. "The best of the oil and the best of the wine and grain I have given to you. The first fruits of everything in their land, which they offer to G-d, will be yours... Everything that is confiscated within Yisrael will be yours. Everyone that is the start of a womb... will be yours." [8:12-15]. The Levites are also expected to receive maaser in return for their labors in guarding the holy site: "With respect to the sons of Levi, I have given them all of the maaser in

Yisrael as a heritage, in return for the labors that they perform in the Tent of Meeting." [8:21].

The transfer of the contributions of Bnei Yisrael from G-d to the Kohanim and the Levites also leads to another change. Since they are to receive the gifts, there is no longer any reason for them to receive a heritage in Eretz Yisrael. "And G-d said to Aharon, you will not inherit in their land, and you will not have a portion among them. I am your inheritance and your portion among Bnei Yisrael... For I have given the Levites the contribution of Bnei Yisrael, that they have given to G-d, as a heritage. Therefore, I have said to them, You will not receive a heritage among Bnei Yisrael." [8:20,24]. Receiving the gifts from Bnei Yisrael is not necessarily a benefit that every member of the Tribe of Levi desires. The opposite may well be true. The special sanctity of Levi provides them a means of livelihood, but on the other hand it prevents them from having a strong economic position, because they have no heritage.

The situation of the priests in Bnei Yisrael is very different compared to all the other nations, as can be seen from the verse that describes the status of the priests of Pharaoh, which outwardly appears similar to the verse quoted above. "For it is a rule for the priests from Pharaoh, and they could consume what was given to them by Pharaoh. Therefore, they did not sell their land." [Bereishit 47:22]. The priests of Pharaoh receive a stipend from the king, and this special status gave them exclusive ownership of their land, even during the harsh days of the famine during Yosef's rule. The Kohanim of Bnei Yisrael, on the other hand, do receive their sustenance from the Almighty, the king of kings, but as a consequence of this special status they do not receive any heritage at all.

