

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

"You have gone too far! The whole community are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" (Num. 16:3). What exactly was wrong in what Korach and his motley band of fellow agitators said? We know that Korach was a demagogue, not a democrat. He wanted power for himself, not for the people. We know also that the protestors were disingenuous. Each had their own reasons to feel resentful toward Moses or Aaron or fate. Set these considerations aside for a moment and ask: was what they said true or false?

They were surely right to say, "All the congregation are holy." That, after all, is what God asked the people to be: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are (in some sense) priests, and a nation all of whose citizens are holy. (Some suggest that their mistake was to say, "all the congregation are holy" (kulam kedoshim), instead of "all the congregation is holy" (kula kedoshah). The holiness of the congregation is collective rather than individual. Others say that they should have said, "is called on to be holy" rather than "is holy". Holiness is a vocation, not a state.)

They were equally right to say, "God is with them." That was the point of the making of the Tabernacle: "Have them make My Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Exodus ends with these words: "So the Cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the Cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels" (Ex. 40:38). The Divine Presence was visibly with the people wherever they went.

What was wrong was their last remark: "Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" This was not a small mistake. It was a fundamental one. Moses represents the birth of a new kind of leadership. That is what Korach and his followers did not understand. Many of us do not understand it still.

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

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

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

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

The name given to this is servant leadership, and its origin is in the Torah. The highest accolade given to Moses is that he was "the servant of the Lord" (Deut. 34:5). Moses is given this title eighteen times in Tanach. Only one other leader merits the same description: Joshua, who is described this way twice.

(The well-known text on this theme is Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, New York, Paulist Press, 1977. Greenleaf does not, however, locate this

idea in Torah. Hence it is important to see that it was born here, with Moses.)

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

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

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

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

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

The same applies to all positions of leadership. Maimonides lists among those who have no share in the world to come, someone who "imposes a rule of fear on the community, not for the sake of Heaven." Such a person "rules over a community by force, so that people are greatly afraid and terrified of him," doing so "for his own glory and personal interests." Maimonides adds to this last phrase: "like heathen kings." (Hilchot Teshuvah 3:13) The polemical intent is clear. It is not that no one behaves this way. It is that this is not a Jewish way to behave.

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

Norway, December 10, 1964)

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

Sometimes the worst mistakes we make are when we project our feelings onto others. Korach was an ambitious man, so he saw Moses and Aaron as two people driven by ambition, "setting themselves above God's congregation." He did not understand that in Judaism to lead is to serve. Those who serve do not lift themselves high. They lift other people high. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**F**or the entire congregation are all holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's assembly?" [Num. 16:3]. Where did Korach err in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron? On the surface, his argument appears to be both logical and just: "You [Moses and Aaron] have gone too far. The entire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's assembly?" Indeed, did not the Torah command the nation, "You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2)?

According to Korach, if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity. The era of the old guard rule (Moses' family) must come to an end; Korach's family must be given its chance to express its inherent holiness!

Granted, so goes this argument, God revealed Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, and spoke directly only to him; but perhaps, if Korach had been raised in the palace of the pharaohs, and if he had had the opportunity as a free man of princely background to slay the Egyptian taskmasters, undoubtedly God would have spoken to him, as well. After all, we are all holy! It's just that some have received more special opportunities than others! On the surface, Korach's words contain a glib truth.

In reality, however, Korach and Moses represent two different philosophies of life. At Mount Sinai, God did not declare everyone to be holy. Rather, He placed into the world the possibility of achieving holiness. "You shall be holy" is a command, not a promise or a declaration of an existing fact. It represents a potential, attainable by means of the commitment to a lifestyle of 613 commandments.

When Korach argues that everyone is holy, that

he, too, could have achieved what Moses achieved had he only had the proper opportunity, he is, in fact, uprooting holiness, not defending it. After all, if everyone and everything is holy, then the word "holy" loses its meaning. By arguing for holiness in the way that he does, Korach actually argues against holiness. In his view, we need not strive to achieve holiness. We are already holy!

Perhaps this is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses about the commandments of tzitzit (ritual fringes) and mezuzah. Does a garment which is wholly tekhelet still require a thread of tekhelet in its ritual fringes? Does a house filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah (which holds only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moses replies in the affirmative, Korach laughs at the apparent lack of logic in Moses' teaching!

But Korach misses the point. Moses teaches that the human being must constantly strive to improve, to become more holy than he was before. Humans must never dare rest on their laurels, because evil is always lying in wait to ensnare, even at the mouth of the grave. Hence, even a house filled with Torah scrolls still requires a mezuzah at the front door, and even a garment that is wholly tekhelet still requires ritual fringes. Never be complacent. There is never sufficient holiness; we must always strive for more!

In contrast, Korach maintains that the status quo is holy – because nothing need change, grow, or develop. This is, in fact, the meaning of Korach's name: the Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean "bald" – no hair grows on a bald head – or "ice" – no vegetation developed during the Ice Age. "As is his name, so is he." Korach rejects the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he is cynically scornful of one's ability to grow and develop and change and inspire. This mistaken worldview is the core flaw of Korach's rebellion.

Moses' (and God's) approach is fundamentally different. When Moses announces to the rebels the means by which God will determine who is holy to Him, he orders Korach and his men bring fire in the fire pans and offer incense. Why?

At its best, fire symbolizes the possibility of change. By means of extreme heat, the hardest materials can be made to bend and melt, can be transformed from solid to liquid and to many states in between. Likewise, incense improves its surroundings: the sweet-smelling fragrance can remove the rancid odor of death and decay, and can transform the slaughtered carcasses of the animal sacrifices into an experience of commitment to God that can perfect the world.

Moses' vision is one of optimistic faith, the rising flames that draw forth the fragrance of the incense and soar heavenward. Material objects, humanity, the very world can be changed, elevated,

and sanctified. All that is required is our merit, commitment, and achievement. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah teaches us in this week's reading that one should never underestimate the power and influence that ego and arrogance can play within the lives of people who are otherwise seen as wise, capable, and even moral. Throughout the ages, the commentators have asked themselves the famous question, quoted by Rashi and based on midrash: "What drove Korach to commit such a foolish act?"

Rashi points out that Korach understood that his descendants in future generations would be prominent people of great leadership. He could not imagine that they would achieve such a status of power and recognition when he himself was not able to boast of such an achievement. While this explanation certainly cast some light on the issue, it does not fully resolve the problem.

There are many instances in life and history when later generations of a certain family rose to power and influence, even though their origins were humble. Most commentators fall back on the idea that it was the great wealth that Korach possessed that drove him to this folly of behavior.

We are aware that wealth and money many times do strange things to otherwise normal people. The Talmud always pictured money -- coins -- as being made of fire. They can warm and illuminate or burn and destroy. That certainly is true of the nature of money and how it affects individuals, especially those who have become wealthy over a short period of time. Our world is full of examples of wealthy people who suddenly become experts in all sorts of disciplines in life, whereas before they were wealthy, did not claim such expertise.

It is interesting to note that the Torah sought to limit the potential for any of the Levite families from becoming exceedingly wealthy. Levites in the land of Israel were subject to public service. Their income was based upon the goodwill of their Israelite neighbors, who would grant them their share of the food ordained by the Torah. I imagine that no matter how much of the tithe any given Levite would have received, the feeling of being wealthy -- certainly, exceedingly wealthy -- would not ever be experienced.

People who are dependent upon the goodwill of others never feel themselves as secure as those who possess great wealth. The truth is that no one is secure, and that even great wealth can disappear in an unknowing and unpredictable fashion. Nevertheless, when a person knows that he or she does not possess great wealth, that person is more careful and circumspect in advancing opinions and demanding

honor. The combination of the natural ego that exist within all of us, and especially those like Korach who have aristocratic bloodlines combined with the largess of great wealth, can oftentimes be a lethal mix that leads to disaster. That certainly was the case regarding Korach and his group of followers. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The controversy of Korach and his congregation – unlike the controversy of the scholars Hillel and Shammai – is a controversy not pursued in a heavenly cause. It therefore does not endure (Ethics of the Fathers 5:17). Why is Korach's disagreement with 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 (Malbim, Numbers 16:1).

Supporting Malbim's approach is the text in Ethics of the Fathers that describes the controversy as one that existed between Korach and his congregation, not Korach and Moses. In other words, Korach's group was racked by dissension from within, with each person wanting the priesthood for himself.

In contrast, the Korach incident occurs on the heels of two sincere critiques of Moses. In the first, Miriam was well intentioned when lambasting Moses for not remaining with his wife, as she was concerned he was rejecting basic family values (Rashi, Numbers 12:1). In the second, the spies innocently misunderstood their mission as presented by Moses. Moses asked for an objective assessment of conditions in Israel; they returned with a subjective rather than a factual report, insisting the land could not be conquered (Nachmanides, Numbers 13:28). Korach's rebellion, however, was a pure power play. He wanted the helm; he wanted to rule, as did his cohorts (Numbers 16:3).

Korach's cohorts also refused to dialogue with Moses (16:12). An essential principle of controversy for the sake of heaven is the recognition that no single person has a monopoly on truth. Although one may be committed to a particular position, one must nevertheless be open and respectful of dissenting views.

This is an essential ingredient in all spheres of leadership, especially in politics. Hearing and 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 Moses, Moses might have calmed them down. He could have explained that their arguments had some merit and suggested that in time, they participate in other leadership roles, rather than attempt to undo the Kohen-Levi caste system.

Note a deep teaching of Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Isbitza in his Mei Hashiloach. He points out that Korach's children, who wrote some of the Psalms, are identified as his descendants. In fact, Psalm 49, "La'mnatze'ach 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 of the Fathers states a controversy for heaven will ba'sofah (in the end) endure. End, or sofah, has two meanings: finish, or purpose, as in "means to an end" (The Royal Reach).

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. Korach's purpose in disagreeing with Moses was to destroy the system of the priesthood.

The challenge presented in Parashat Korach is to recognize the fine line between dissent that is self-serving, disrespectful, and fleeting, and dissent for the sake of heaven, which is value-centered, respectful, and enduring. ©2021 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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Restrain to Sustain: How to Win Every Argument

Who doesn't love a good argument? Whether as participant or spectator, for many there is a thrill in expressing opposing ideas and hearing the responses elicited. "Taking sides" is a natural human reaction when presented with a choice.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:17) teaches that: כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים. ושאנה לשם שמים, אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הגלל ושמיא. ושאנה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

Every argument that is for [the sake of] heaven's name, it is destined to endure. But if it is not for [the sake of] heaven's name -- it is not destined to endure. What is [an example of an argument] for [the sake of] heaven's name? The argument of Hillel and Shammai. What is [an example of an argument] not for [the sake of] heaven's name? The argument of Korach and all of his congregation.

Some arguments are noble in nature, such as the discourse between study partners learning Torah

together in the Beit Midrash. It is not about power or egos but rather the pure pursuit to reach the truth.

Disagreements turn ugly when it involves a selfish agenda, desire for glory, or when the argument is just an end unto itself (arguing for arguing's sake).

Parshat Korach tells of the challenge for leadership against Moshe and Aharon by Korach and his "gang". When referencing the argument, the Mishna in Avot only refers to Korach and his people while not mentioning the names of Moshe and Aharon as players in the dispute.

The reason is simple. While Korach was only out for his own interests, Moshe and Aharon took their stand for the sake of heaven. They were defending the glory of G-d, not their own honor.

Moshe and Aharon are pillars of the Jewish people while Korach and his followers fell into the abyss (literally) of infamy.

While it is sad that people like Korach let their ego get the best of them, the deeper tragedy lies with those who let themselves be sucked into the fray. In most cases, these people are innocent bystanders but can't resist joining the fight.

The Talmud in Chulin (89A) says that the world exists due to one who restrains his or her mouth during an argument, as it is written: "...The world is suspended on nothing (תולה ארץ על בלימה)". This means that when a person decides to contribute nothing to an argument, they are, in fact, preserving peace.

War and destruction come from disagreements that get out of hand. Peace and goodwill result from the ability to restrain ourselves and compromise with our rivals.

There are many temptations in our daily lives to argue with others- it's actually quite easy to pick a fight about any and all subjects. With the constant barrage of news and opinions, whether based on fact or not, we are constantly goaded into taking a side. Many of these "debates" are the result, or cause of, Loshon Hara, evil speech. Beyond the inherent sins in speaking or accepting Loshon Hara, is the negative atmosphere that such discourse creates.

Our actions have enormous effect. We can enflame a situation by expressing an opinion or diffuse it through silence or wisdom.

When confronted with a dispute, one should first analyze what are the goals of each side.

Is it the pursuit of truth and justice or fueling of egos and desire? Take a deep breath and a good look. Do I want to be a part of this?

That pause to reflect, rather than offering a rash response, could make the difference between sustaining the world through restraint or fanning a fire that leads to tragedy, G-d forbid.

May all of our actions be for the sake of heaven and each other. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

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

"And Moshe arose and went to Dasan and Aviram..." (*Bamidbar* 16:25) The Ohr HaChaim teaches that the Torah was telling us Moshe achieved an elevated status through this act (as telling us he stood, implying he had been sitting, would not be noteworthy.) Because he humbled himself to go to these undeserving men in order to attempt to make peace, Hashem uplifted Moshe and gave him more honor.

If you pay attention, you will find an interesting progression throughout the Parsha. The first time these men are mentioned, they are referred to as "Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav... sons of Reuven." In fact, one reason they instigated the challenge against Moshe

with Korach was because they were from Reuven, Yaakov Avinu's bechor.

When summoning them to appear before him (the source for summoning a person to Bais Din), the Torah tells us (16:12), "And Moshe sent to call to Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav." At that time, they no longer have Reuven's name attached to them. Though Moshe sought to speak to them privately and accord them the honor of a private audience, they responded by maligning him and refusing to appear.

Finally, we come to our posuk, when Moshe went to them himself, accompanied by the elders. Once again, they came out swearing and blaspheming and refusing to acknowledge Moshe's leadership. This time, they are referred to simply as Dasan and Aviram. Why the progressive change of removing their ancestry?

Perhaps we can explain that when one is part of society, he must take into account the needs of others. The firstborn in a family gets special deference because if the father dies, he steps into that role of caring for the rest. Reuven, as the bechor, represented caring for the Children of Israel.

If one does not accept responsibility for his community, he can at least think of his family and his role in it. That was when the Torah mentioned their father's name, to recall that they belonged to a group and should think of at least those people.

But Dasan and Aviram thought of no one other than themselves. They did not feel an obligation towards anyone and refused to show deference to anyone. This was highlighted in the posuk to show how they fell so low as to be necessarily removed from the world.

They stand as a stark example of what can happen when you worry only about yourself, and this lesson is counterbalanced by Moshe, who could rightfully have ignored them, yet humbled himself for them and was honored by Hashem. Moshe put others first, and that is what led him to greatness.

A fellow paying a shiva call in Yerushalayim seemed confused when he didn't recognize the mourners. It turned out that he was in the wrong house, as the family of the same name he intended to visit lived a few streets away. However, being that he was there, he sat down to be menachem aveil.

The visitor was a Gabbai of R' Aharon Leib Shteinman z"l, and as it turned out, the husband of the nifteres had been a student of R' Aharon Leib fifty years before. They traded stories and recollections of R' Aharon Leib, and then the Gabbai left and went to the other shiva house.

Upon his return to Bnei Brak, he mentioned this occurrence to R' Aharon Leib. Though he didn't remember this talmid, he told the gabbai to take him to Yerushalayim, where he sat with the man for 25 minutes before returning home. At nearly 100 years old and with a very busy schedule, R' Aharon Leib's trips to

Yerushalayim were always planned in advance, but when he heard a Talmid had lost his wife, there was nothing to discuss. He had to go to comfort him. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Righteous Argument

The rebellion of Korach and his followers is the epitome of an argument that is not for the sake of Heaven. Nechama Leibovitz describes an argument for the sake of Heaven as one in which each side is not invested in a particular outcome, but both are seeking the Truth. Each of the people involved in Korach's rebellion sought a benefit. Korach wished to replace Aharon as the Kohen Gadol because he wanted the power that would come from this position. Datan and Aviram had a personal grudge against Moshe as well as against anyone who held a leadership position. They were also angry that the tribe of Reuven was displaced from its leadership position as the first born. The two hundred and fifty men were embarrassed because they were important people who should have been chosen as the priests instead of an arbitrary hereditary priesthood from Aharon. The Ibn Ezra even says that these men were all firstborn sons and that the Levi'im took away their responsibilities in the Temple.

There are many midrashim which describe the attacks that Korach made on Moshe and his leadership. Rashi tells us that Korach questioned Moshe's logic when he discussed the blue thread that was wound into the tzitzit (fringes). If one blue thread in each tzitzit could make a tallit kosher, does a tallit that is made up entirely of blue thread require tzitzit? This question had a two-fold purpose. Moshe's answer of "yes" would seem arbitrary. More importantly, the underlying statement was that a nation that was entirely "holy" (represented by the blue thread) does not need to have a spiritual leader (Aharon). Korach's second question about a mezuzah on a door of a room in which was kept a Sefer Torah had a similar two-fold purpose. The Midrash then continues with the story of how Aharon and Moshe conspired to "defraud" and harass a widow who lost her farm because of the many difficult taxes that Moshe and Aharon arbitrarily produced against her (ma'aser, t'rumah, leket, shich'cha, pe'ah). She then purchased a flock of sheep only to lose the firstborn and the tenth animal every year as well as the first shearing. If she slaughtered the animal, she would lose portions of it to the Kohen and if she disowned it, she would lose all of it to the Kohen. Aharon and Moshe looked like they invented these laws for personal gain and not at the command of Hashem. Korach was willing to make Hashem's laws appear to be frivolous so that he could accomplish his plan. Even though Korach's actions were inexcusable, Moshe tried to answer Korach calmly and with reason.

Moshe began his "defense" to Korach with a phrase that is both polite and respectful: "Listen please, sons of Levi." Moshe continued by pointing out that Korach and the B'nei Levi, whom he represented, were also in an exalted position, set aside from the rest of the Levi'im and the rest of B'nei Yisrael. Korach was a descendant of Kahat, the family of Levi'im responsible for the holiest objects in the Temple. Of the three sections of Levi'im, the descendants of Kahat were the most honored. Moshe appealed to Korach to be satisfied that he was still above the other Levi'im even though he lacked a leadership title.

The followers of Korach whom Ibn Ezra described as the firstborn, are not credited with saying anything. We do, however, see two responses of Moshe to their behavior. When Moshe heard of their complaints that implied that Moshe had created laws and positions for his own benefit, Moshe fell on his face. Moshe was not embarrassed for himself. Moshe understood that this complaint negated the Divine origin of his mission and of the laws themselves. This was an insult to Hashem more than to him. Moshe was a humble man. He could forgive an insult to him, but not to Hashem. Moshe's second act was a warning to these rebels. Moshe tells them to each assemble an incense burner, and to bring incense in it to Hashem to see which He would choose. We should remember here the sin of Nadav and Avihu who brought a strange fire before Hashem and were consumed by their actions. These men should have seen the danger that this action might bring, but their arrogance colored their perception.

Datan and Aviram were beyond hope, yet Moshe gave them an opportunity to reverse their actions. Moshe called them to a private conference so they would not lose face before their fellow conspirators. Their answer was "we will not go up." Their insults continued by twisting Moshe's words 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." Datan and Aviram stood proudly and defiantly in front of their tents with their wives and children placed in jeopardy.

Korach and his followers were much more dangerous than their own small rebellion. Two hundred and fifty men against six hundred thousand hardly seems to be significant. But the seeds of that rebellion continued after their deaths. We find that the people complained to Moshe that he was responsible for the death of his fellow Jews. This complaint would never have been made had the rebellion not taken place. Moshe's esteem would not be regained so quickly. This is one of the lessons of lashon hara, evil gossip. Even if we do not believe the gossip, we are bound to lose some faith in the person spoken about. It is not enough that we not speak lashon hara, but we must distance ourselves from even hearing it. That is why it

is such an important mitzvah.

Our leaders today reflect what we have become. Gossip is a regular part of every electoral campaign, and our respect for our leaders diminishes every day. We reap what we sow. But there are other leaders to whom we must look for guidance. Our Rabbis and our Sages are examples of the Torah approach to leadership. At times some negativity and lashon hara exists, but there is much less negative leadership than in the general society. Our Torah must be our guide in all matters, and this will eliminate the problems within our arguments. May we strive to make all of our disagreements l'sheim shamayim, for the sake of Heaven. May we strive for the Truth and not for personal gain. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Korach's Parah Adumah

"Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi took..." (Bamidbar 16:1) The pasuk never does get around to telling us what he took, which led Onkelos and Rashi to explain that Korach took himself, i.e. he separated himself from the main body of the community, to lead a rebellion against Moshe. Why? Many cite a midrash that inexplicably states that it was the parah adumah which emboldened Moshe to challenge Korach. (I have not been able to trace its source.)

How are we to understand this? We might begin with the Torah's introduction to Moshe's long leave-taking of the Bnei Yisrael. It locates Moshe's speech "between Lavan and Chatzeros and Di-Zahav." (Devarim 1:1) Each one of the place-names in this pasuk is assumed to allude to a different event in which the Jews in the wilderness sinned against Hashem. However, the places are arranged achronologically: Chatzeros alludes to Korach, while Di-Zahav refers to the eigel, which occurred earlier.

In response to the eigel, Moshe quickly interceded on behalf of his people. He attempted to deflect guilt from them. He argued that Hashem had banned idolatry only in conversation with him, Moshe. The people might have reacted appropriately if they had heard the prohibition directly from Him, rather than through Moshe as an intermediary.

How strong was this argument? The best evidence comes from parah adumah, which R. Moshe Ha-Darshan teaches (cited by Rashi Bamidbar 19:22) is a reference to the eigel, as the mother cow is called upon to attend to the mess of her young calf. Korach deduced from this that Moshe's argument was ineffective. He reasoned that the Bnei Yisrael were guilty, because they had indeed heard the first two Dibros directly from HKBH. As he elegantly phrased his conclusion, "The entire assembly -- all of them -- are holy and Hashem is among them. (Bamidbar 16:3) All of them heard some of the Dibros at Sinai, directly from

G-d." (Rashi, ad loc) Therefore, he argued, the people did not need a Moshe to be their leader and teacher. They were all spiritually elevated; they did not need to cede some of their autonomy to a human power.

In effect, the message that Korach heard from the parah adumah was the equivalence of all Jews. If it were not so, there would not have been any need for the parah atoning for the sin of the eigel. Because of that equivalence, they didn't need a Moshe. He was abusing his power, and needed to be stopped. The rest is history.

Possible as well is that Korach detected a different message from the parah adumah. It, too, is based on the assumption that the parah adumah atones for the chet ha-eigel.

Moshe's reaction to the dancing around the eigel was to smash the luchos. One way to look at this is that the luchos represent the talmid chacham; smashing them was a declaration that the gadol is willing to die to effect kapparrah for his flock, since the death of a tzadik brings atonement. Indeed, Moshe immediately bargained with Hashem for Him to forgive the Bnei Yisrael. If He refused, Moshe boldly requested, "Erase me now from Your book that You have written." (Shemos 32:32) Moshe meant that he was willing to die and disappear from the Torah if that would achieve atonement for his people.

Korach knew all this. He also knew that Moshe's offer seemingly was not accepted. He knew this through the parah adumah. The people were still in need of kapparrah, necessitating a parah adumah. Korach reasoned that Moshe did not stand head and shoulders above the rest of the nation. All of them were holy. They did not have to subjugate themselves to Moshe's authority. Korach therefore set himself up as a counter-force to Moshe, separating himself from the body of the community and standing to the side, from where he could begin his rebellion. (Based on Chidushei R. Yosef Nechemia (Kornitzer) (1880-1933), Rav of Krakow) ©2021 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Following Korach's rebellion, which is described in our Parashah, Elazar Ha'kohen was told to take the copper pans in which each of the rebels had offered Ketoret / incense and to hammer them out as a covering for the Mizbai'ach / altar. The Torah explains, "As a reminder to Bnei Yisrael, so that no alien who is not a descendant of Aharon draw near to [offer Ketoret] before Hashem, that he not be like Korach and his assembly..." Commenting on this verse, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) teaches: "Anyone who carries-on a Machloket / divisive disagreement transgresses the negative commandment 'that he not be like Korach and his assembly'."

R' Sasson Mordechai Moshe z"l (Baghdad;

1747-1829) writes: This transgression is not like most other transgressions, because a person transgresses it at every moment, night and day, if he could put a Machloket to rest and he fails to make peace. He writes further: When a person is involved in Machloket, how can he pray in Shemoneh Esrei daily: "Sim shalom" / "Establish peace"--asking Hashem to do something that he refuses to do himself? We know that Hashem hates Machloket, for on the day when Hashem created division (the second day, when He divided between the waters above and the waters below), the Torah does not say, "Ki tov" / "It was good." Notably, that was a division that was necessary, but Hashem still refused to call it "good." The Torah tells us, on the opposite extreme, that fire and water--sworn enemies--made peace to do the will of Hashem, when the hailstones in Egypt came down with fire inside them. How much more should we, who are recipients of reward and punishment for our deeds, learn to make peace! (Kol Sasson ch.27)

"They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them, 'It is too much for you! For the entire assembly--all of them--are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?'" (16:3)

How could Korach and his followers make such an accusation? asks R' Shalom Flam z"l (1929-2003; Stretiner Rebbe in Brooklyn, N.Y.). After all, the Torah testifies (Bemidbar 12:3), "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth"! Likewise, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) says that some of Bnei Yisrael suspected Moshe of other sins. How is that possible?

R' Flam answers: When a person has not perfected his own character, he sees his own faults in other people--even in a Tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu. He can think that he himself is the Tzaddik and the second person--the Tzaddik--has precisely those faults that the first person himself has. He is like someone looking in a mirror, but not realizing it.

The next verse relates: "Moshe heard and fell on his face." R' Flam explains: R' Yitzchak Luria z"l ("The Arizal"; 1534-1572) teaches that those who know how, can read a person's sins on his face. Moshe fell on his face as if to say: "They are not seeing these sins on my face." Also, this action said: "There is no purpose in my engaging with them." (Divrat Shalom) © 2021 S. Katz & torah.org

