

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is what is now happening in the campaign against Israel on campuses throughout the world, and in the BDS movement in particular. Like the Korach rebellion it brings together people who have nothing else in common. Some belong to the far left, a few to the far right, some are anti-globalists, while some are genuinely concerned with the plight of the Palestinians. Driving it all, however, are people who on theological and political grounds are opposed to the existence of Israel within any boundaries whatsoever, and are equally opposed to democracy, free speech, freedom of information, religious liberty, human rights and the

sanctity of life. What they have in common is a refusal to give the supporters of Israel a fair hearing -- thus flouting the fundamental principle of justice, expressed in Roman law in the phrase *Aude alteram partem*, "Hear the other side."

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

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

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's reading describes the rebellion of Korach and other disastrous incidents that occurred to the generation that left Egypt, who were destined to expire in the desert of Sinai. After the previous debacles: the complaints against Moshe by Miriam and Aaron, the demand for food, the ingratitude towards the manna that fell from heaven, the failed mission of the spies who visited the land of Israel and the military defeat suffered by the Jews at the hands of the Canaanites, it seems that this generation would have learned its lesson by now.

Instead of internalizing the reasons for these events and their reactions, we read in this week's portion about the anger and frustration by many of the leaders that was turned upon Moshe instead of the self-examination that would have been proper and beneficial. Korach and his group spoke in the name of high-sounding democracy and equality. It is quite common in history that dangerous, corrupt, and nefarious political groups always claim the high moral ground for themselves.

One of the great shams of Marxism was that it always used high sounding moral adjectives to describe itself. When it was the aggressor, it called itself peace loving. When it was totalitarian and dictatorial in its rule, it always titled itself Democratic and progressive. The

high-sounding words of fairness and equality that were hurled against Moshe by Korach and his group of followers, sound hollow to us even today, thousands of years later.

We have witnessed in our own time the fact that disparate groups and differing individuals unite because of a common hatred or dislike of another group or person. According to the Midrash, each of the 250 followers of Korach had a different agenda and ambition for themselves. It was the opportunity to strike down Moshe, whose presence and greatness so tormented them, that it brought all of these differing personalities together and ironically guaranteed them a common fate of destruction.

Because of his piety and innocence, Moshe is the greatest thorn in the side of the rebels who are only looking for their satisfaction and advancement. Moshe understands it is not his personal honor that is at stake here, but rather the entire concept of Torah leadership and the essence of being a special people with a divine mission. It is not his personal reputation alone that he is defending but, rather, the spiritual future of the Jewish people.

The rebellion of Korach is not a small offense but a great personal failing like the sin of the Golden Calf. It is a mortal blow to the continuity of the Jewish people and to its very survival. The Torah describes the events throughout the desert of Sinai so that we will be aware of the pitfalls that lie at the footsteps of personal ambition and unwarranted hubris. ©2022 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And they rose up in the face of Moses" (Numbers 16:2) When is dissension and argument positive, healthy debate and an outgrowth of "these and those are the word of the Living God" (B.T. Eruvin 13), and when is dispute negative, a venomous cancer which can destroy the very underpinning of our nation?

Apparently Korach's rebellious dissent is negative, as the Talmud maintains: "Rav said: He who is unyielding in maintaining a dispute violates a negative command, as it is written, 'And let him not be as Korach, and his company'" (B.T. Sanhedrin 110a). But can we glean from this statement operative guidelines as to when it is right and when it is wrong to argue?

We all know the story of Korach, the subject of this week's Torah portion; this rebel against Mosaic authority and Aaronic Priesthood influenced 250 leading Israelite personages to stand up against the

established and Divinely ordained leadership.

After a contest between the upstarts and Moses involving the offering of fire-pans of incense to determine the chosen of God, which concludes with Korach and his cohorts being consumed by a Divine fire, God commands that the 250 pans of the rebels be pounded into plates to cover the altar: "To be a memorial to the children of Israel, that no stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before God; do not be as Korach, and his company, as God said by the hand of Moses, concerning him" (Numbers 17:5).

Rav's prooftext regarding an unyielding disputant comes from this verse; the Bible is therefore saying, according to Rav's interpretation, that no one should ever again maintain a dispute, as God said concerning him, that is, concerning Korach. This view would maintain that the problem of Korach was that he would not give in and continued the argument; one may raise a dissenting opinion, but when the accepted leader rejects it, the dissenter must back down.

Rashi suggests a different understanding. He takes the pronoun "him" to refer to Aaron; the problem with Korach's argument was that he was challenging God's chosen Kohanim – the descendants of Aaron – as the only legitimate priests. Such a challenge can never be allowed in the future, "as God said concerning him" – that is, concerning Aaron.

Rav Isaac Bernstein, z"l, of London, in a masterful lecture, cited the Hatam Sofer, who claims that it is the attitude of the dissenter – and not the subject of his dissent – which makes the difference. This Sage bemoans the fact that all too often, when two people argue, one (or both) of the parties involved will claim that only he has a direct pipeline to God; consequently only he has the only right opinion, and the other view must be totally delegitimized. These individuals claim that they are arguing "for the sake of heaven, in the name of God and Torah".

Supporting his view, the Hatam Sofer reads the verse, "don't be like Korach, and his company, (who argued that) God spoke by the hand of Moses (only) to him;" to Korach; it is forbidden for any individual to maintain that God speaks only to him, that only he knows the truth, and that there is no possibility of truth to his opponent. Hence an illegitimate and therefore improper debate is one which seeks to delegitimize the other side, declaring that only one side has the whole truth!

The Hatam Sofer proves his point from the case of R. Eliezer in the Talmud, who actually did have a pipeline to God (B.T. Bava Metzia 59b) but nevertheless was bested in debate by the Sages because, in the final analysis, halakha is determined by the logic of the majority of the Sages, not by voices from heaven.

The Talmud records how R. Eliezer disagreed

with his contemporaries on the status of a particular oven. He was absolutely convinced that he was right and to prove his claim, he asked and received a series of signs from heaven demonstrating the accuracy of his halakhic opinion. Nevertheless, since his was a minority view in the face of a majority ruling, his refusal to relent led to his excommunication. The case of R. Eliezer is brought to teach that even if you are certain that God is on your side, you dare not read the other view out of the realm of legitimacy.

Rabbi Bernstein further directs us to another fascinating source. We have a mishnah in Tractate Sukkah with the following law: "If a man's head and the greater part of his body were within the sukkah and his table of food and within the house (thus outside of the Sukkah), Beit Shammai declared such a meal on Sukkot to be invalid and Beit Hillel declared it valid... Beit Hillel says to Beit Shammai: 'Was there not an incident wherein the elders of Beit Shammai and elders of Beit Hillel went to visit R. Yochanan the son of the Hurani, and they found him sitting with his head and the greater part of his body in a sukkah, and the table of food inside the house, and they did not make any comment about it? Did this not imply that the Academy of Shammai had acquiesced in this case to the Academy of Hillel!' Beit Shammai said to them: 'Here (specifically) is the proof (to our position).' In actuality, the elders of Beit Shammai did say to R. Yochanan 'If it is in such a way that you always perform (the mitzvah of Sukkah), then you never (successfully) performed the commandment in your lifetime' (Mishnah Sukkah 2:7)." And so Beit Shammai never gave in to Beit Hillel!

How are we to understand the mishnah?

This issue is addressed in the work of R. Naftali of Vermaiser, "Maaleh Ratzon", in which he explained the mishnah as follows: the elders of Beit Shammai and the elders of Beit Hillel had indeed been present together at the sukkah of R. Yochanan, and they all saw that their host conducted himself in accordance with the law of Beit Hillel. Beit Shammai, although of a different opinion than Beit Hillel, said nothing – because of their respect for Beit Hillel, and because they understood the validity of a dissenting opinion different from their own. Only after the elders of Beit Hillel left the sukkah did the elders of Beit Shammai clarify their alternative position by presenting another viewpoint.

This sensitivity displayed by the representatives of the two major and opposing Academies in Mishnaic times emphasizes the fundamental pluralism in the Talmud: two views may be at loggerheads, but we must respect and learn from – rather than revile and delegitimize – our opponents. And two opposing sides in a debate can and must respect and socialize with each other, even to the extent of marrying into each others' families!

Can we say that we have adequately absorbed the lessons of the dangers of dispute and dissension?

Has Korach and Korachism truly been consumed by fire, never to be heard from again?

Would that it were so! ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

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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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah identifies those who participated in the rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Led by Korach, the group included Datan, Aviram, On, and 250 nesi'ei edah (leaders; Numbers 16:1–2).

In time, Korach convinces many others from the larger community to join in the revolt. One wonders to what degree they were allied (16:19).

It may be that, although the new recruits – whom we will also call the larger congregation – were not the instigators and not central to the rebellion, they

implied, by drawing near Korach and his group, that they agreed with him. In the words of Malbim, “[Since they] stood silently listening to Korach, it appeared they agreed with him” (Malbim, Numbers 16:21).

Alternatively, the new recruits stood near Korach, neutral, waiting to take sides depending on how things worked out. Perhaps counterintuitively, I have more respect for someone who disagrees with me and voices a dissenting opinion than for someone who remains neutral. The former stands for something, the latter for nothing.

It can also be argued that the new recruits were, deep down, sympathetic to Moses but stood by indifferently. It can be easier to respect an antagonist than someone who agrees with you but remains silent.

Indifference, an unwillingness to become involved, is an even greater wrong than taking an incorrect position. As the popularized version of John Stuart Mill’s quote goes, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

In most legal systems, a person who witnesses a wrong and does nothing bears ethical responsibility but no legal consequences. Judaism disagrees. Remaining indifferent as another is in jeopardy makes one legally culpable. As the Torah states, “Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother” (Leviticus 19:16).

In the end, God demands that Moses and Aaron stand apart from the larger congregation, teaching that remaining neutral and indifferent in the face of wrong must be rejected (Numbers 16:21). Indeed, when seeing wrong, one must stand up and be counted, speaking truth to power. ©2022 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

How to Serve

The rebellion of Korach and his followers ended with their deaths. Two tests were devised to prove that both Moshe and Aharon were the appropriate leaders of the B’nei Yisrael, appointed by Hashem. The first test, that of the firepans, proved that only Aharon and his sons were permitted to light incense in the service of Hashem. The fact that Moshe could command Aharon to light the incense which, when not commanded by Hashem, had caused the death of two of his sons, indicated that Moshe was appointed by Hashem as His representative and had His support. Before the second test, a plague broke out against those who, in spite of the first test, continued to question Moshe and Aharon. The second test, the test of the staffs which blossomed, proved that Aharon was the spiritual leader of the people.

The Torah reports, “The entire assembly of the B’nei Yisrael complained on the next day against

Moshe and against Aharon, saying, ‘You have killed the people of Hashem!’ And it was when the assembly gathered against Moshe and Aharon, they turned to the Tent of Meeting and behold, the cloud had covered it, and the glory of Hashem appeared. Moshe and Aharon came before the Tent of Meeting. Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Remove yourselves from among this assembly and I shall destroy them in an instant!’ They fell on their faces. Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Take the firepan from upon the altar and place incense, and go quickly and provide atonement for them, for the fury of Hashem has gone out from the presence of Hashem, the plague has begun.’ Aharon took, as Moshe had spoken, and ran to the midst of the congregation, and behold, the plague had begun among the people. He placed the incense and provided atonement for the people. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked.”

Our Rabbis differ on why the people were still rebelling even after seeing what had happened to Korach and his followers. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the people were not yet convinced that the deaths of the two hundred and fifty men indicated that Aharon was exclusively given the responsibilities of the priesthood, and that all others except his descendants were unable to serve as priests. “They did not grasp the true reality of the event.” The Ramban explained that the people did not yet believe that the reason for the rebels’ death was due to a decision by Hashem. They believed that Moshe, not Hashem, devised the test of the firepans which he already knew would cause their deaths. Aharon did not die because his offering of the incense on the firepan was part of his responsibility of the daily offering. The ibn Ezra explained that the people thought that Moshe had killed the rebels through his prayer.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explained that there were two horrifying sites which the people saw: one was the swallowing of Korach, Datan, and Aviram when the ground opened and swallowed them, and the second was the burning of the rebels with their firepans. No one person could have seen both, since one was by the Tent of Meeting and the other took place by the tents of Korach, Datan, and Aviram. Until each person spoke with his friend, the nation was not aware of the extent of the horrible punishments and deaths. It was not until the morning that they complained to Moshe and Aharon. Had Hashem only punished Datan and Aviram, the people would not have complained since these two men had a history of rebellion against Hashem and all authority. Their complaints were about the other men, all of whom were leaders of the community and had a seemingly legitimate argument. The people believed that Moshe and Aharon could have ended the rebellion without killing these leaders.

One of the major mysteries of this section is the use of the firepan and the incense to save the people who were being punished by the plague. We saw with the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's two older sons who offered incense on a firepan when not commanded by Hashem, that one may not do a part of the service, such as the firepans, when not commanded by Hashem. That is why Moshe chose this as the test for the rebels, as all the people would understand that those who were not commanded to bring incense yet brought incense was the reason for their deaths. Yet here, Moshe commanded Aharon to bring incense to stop the plague.

Rashi quotes a Midrash from the Talmud Shabbat (89a) which explains this unusual direction given to Aharon. Moshe knew that incense was an effective way to fight a plague while attaining atonement for those who were condemned to the plague. When Moshe sent Aharon with the incense, Aharon stood between the dead and the living. The Midrash says that the Angel of Death complained to Aharon that he was preventing the Angel from doing his mission. Aharon countered the Angel, telling him that Moshe had commanded him. The Angel said, "I am the messenger of the Omnipresent, and you are only the messenger of Moshe." Aharon explained to the Angel that nothing came out of the mouth of Moshe that came from his own heart, namely, that Moshe's words were the directions from Hashem. Aharon told the Angel to look to the opening of the Tent of Meeting and he would see Hashem speaking with Moshe.

Rashi's alternative explanation of the firepans is also intriguing. He explains that Moshe insisted on using the incense to counter the claims of the B'nei Yisrael who believed that it was a poison. Nadav and Avihu died through the incense, and the two hundred and fifty rebels also died through it. Hashem wished the people to know that it was not a poison, but a plague stopper. What had killed Nadav and Avihu and the two hundred and fifty rebels was their sin. They had chosen the wrong way to serve Hashem.

One of the most difficult tasks that we face is to serve Hashem in the way in which He wishes to be served. We have our own urges and desires which sometimes contradict the ideals which Hashem has given us in the Torah. Sometimes our desire to participate in serving Hashem tempts us to mistake our desire as something which Hashem also desires. Hashem has set the parameters of our service. One does not choose one's parents, so one cannot choose into which tribe he is born. We are each limited in our approach to Hashem, constrained by our tribe, our physical status, and the Laws which govern our spiritual purity or impurity. Still nothing prevents us from praising Hashem, thanking Him for all of His gifts, enjoying the beauty of His World, and living our lives filled with kindness, compassion, and joy. We can all

find our own way to serve Hashem, but we must be satisfied to serve Him within the parameters of the Torah. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Why do you lord yourself over the congregation of the L-rd? (Bamidbar 16:3) Korach accused Moshe of being power hungry. "If you took the kingship for yourself," he argued, "at least don't give your brother the role of Kohain Gadol." As is clear from Moshe's response to Korach, the impetus for this "righteous indignation" was Korach's own desire to be the Kohain Gadol.

He was a viable candidate to be sure. He was one of those who carried the Aron, which required tremendous concentration and focus on Hashem at all times. He was tremendously wealthy, a requirement for the Kohain Gadol. On top of that, Korach saw in his future a descendant (Shmuel HaNavi) who would be equated with Moshe and Aharon.

However, Korach was not chosen to be the Kohain Gadol. He believed it was because Moshe wanted the power for himself and therefore put his brother in the number two spot in the hierarchy of the Jews. He posited that all the Jews were holy and by gaining power at their expense, Moshe was acting improperly, almost a form of me'ila, misappropriation of holy items. Working in the Mishkan, this would be a concept Korach was familiar with.

Another concept he was familiar with was, "Aron nosei es nos'av, the ark carried those who carried it." This was the understanding that the ark of Hashem did not need to be physically carried by the Levi'im. Rather, they acted the part, but it was, in fact, they who were carried by the holy ark.

Perhaps, then, he reasoned that Moshe, by being the King of the Jews, was similarly riding to greatness on their backs. He stated that Moshe and Aharon were literally lifting themselves up "on the congregation of Hashem." That is because Korach misunderstood what a Jewish leader is.

The greater the leader, the more beholden he is to the populace. The greatness of Moshe lay in the fact that he didn't care for himself, but for his charges. He put himself on the line time and time again. Instead of lifting himself up, Moshe uplifted others. When he gave Aharon the position of Kohain Gadol, it was because Aharon could be trusted to worry about others, not himself. He'd displayed this in the past as well. He would befriend sinners as a means of inspiring them to repent. He wouldn't criticize or condemn. He was just there, and the people felt the care and concern he had for them.

The mistake Korach made was thinking of himself when it came to positions in Klal Yisrael. The more one focuses on his own greatness, the less he is

a worthy shepherd of Hashem's flock. The Jewish king is responsible for both the physical and spiritual needs of his subjects, and there is no room for him to "lord over them."

Korach asked why Moshe lifted himself through the holy people. The truth was that it was they who were being uplifted by Moshe.

The Sun and the Wind made a wager. They were trying to see which one of them could make a fellow walking down the street take off his coat. The wind went first, and blew until he was blue in the face, (or blew in the face, or whatever,) but the harder the wind assailed him, the tighter the man drew his jacket around him.

Then it was the sun's turn. He just beamed at the man and the continued warmth of the sun's smile made the fellow peel the jacket right off.

When you want to help someone come closer to Hashem, don't be cold to him, or blow lots of air in his face. It will make him turn his back and cling more tightly to his beliefs. Instead, just love him, be kind, and when he's ready, he'll ask for help in taking off the jacket. © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

Power, power, and more power. There are almost eight billion people on this planet, yet the amount of people who crave power, go after power, and actually have the means to acquire a lot of it, is very, very small. You don't even need to talk conspiracy. You just need to go into Yahoo Finance and, check out the top shareholders of the biggest and most influential companies in the world. You will see the same names show up each time. There are very few who control the lives of very many.

The question is, what comes first? The lust for power, or the power for lust? Are certain people power-driven, and they spend their lives finding ways to accumulate it? Or, were they just like the rest of us until they found themselves with the means to accumulate increasingly greater amounts of power?

When it comes to Korach, the Gemora answers that question:

"Riches kept by his owner to his hurt" (Koheles 5:12). Rebi Shimon ben Lakish said: "This was the wealth of Korach, as it says: 'and all the sustenance that was at their feet' (Devarim 11:6)." Rebi Elazar said: "This refers to a person's money that stands him upon his feet." (Pesachim 118a)

On the other hand, Kabbalah seems to indicate that Korach was born with his instinct for power:

This is the sod of, "And Korach took," [with the verse] not explaining what he took. He took the evil of the Ruach of Kayin from the evil side. This is what our rabbis, z"l, alluded to with their words that he took a "bad acquisition" for himself. [Korach,] when he saw

that he had an ibur of the Ruach from the evil side of Kayin said, "Until now I was from the evil side of Moshe and Hevel, and was subjugated by him. Now that I have the Ruach of Kayin, I am no longer subjugated by him." He wanted to get out from under his authority. (Sha'ar HaPesukim, Korach)

So it seems that Korach was already a megalomaniac from the start. He may not have been destined for power, but he was destined to go after it. Believing he was meant to be powerful one day, he looked at everything in life that way, including his wealth. He may have worked with others, but only inasmuch as they worked for him to his end.

Therefore, the Mishnah states:

Which is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company. (Pirkei Avos 5:17)

Who did Korach fight against? It didn't really matter, since it was as if the opposing side wasn't there for Korach, who was more interested in winning than the truth.

As mentioned in the past, there are basically two types of soul, Kayin and Hevel. Kayin's soul came from the side of Gevurah, a light that is best described as the opposite of Chesed. Chesed is warm and fuzzy, like Hevel and Ya'akov, and Gevurah is cold and exacting, like Kayin and Eisav.

Gevurah doesn't have to result in evil, as Yitzchak Avinu proved. On the contrary, some of the greatest tzaddikim in history have come from the side of Gevuros. But so have the greatest reshayim -- evil people. Someone with a Gevurah-based soul has to work hard to be good. If they do, they can end up being greater than most others.

Take Elisha ben Abuya, for example, otherwise known as Acher -- the Other. According to the Gemora, he was one of Rebi Akiva's colleagues, and one of four rabbis to join Rebi Akiva on his spiritual expedition into Pardes (Chagigah 14b).

Only Rebi Akiva survived the trip. Ben Zoma lost his mind. Ben Azzai lost his life. And Elisha ben Abuya lost his righteousness, and became the quintessential heretic known as Acher. Only Rebi Akiva remained spiritually intact.

Based upon the results, one might ask, why did Rebi Akiva even consider Acher worthy of joining him on so serious a mission? The Leshem explains that it was specifically because of Acher's gevurah-nature that he chose him for the mission. Had Acher succeeded, the Leshem concludes, his tikun to the world would have been the greatest of the four of them.

Shimshon is another good example. He was from the tribe of Dan, which as the name indicates, was very connected to din -- judgment, which is from the side of Gevuros. It was his gevuros that gave him the ability to save the Jewish people from the Philistines, and be their judge as well.

But it was also Shimshon's gevurah that led him to Delilah, the Philistine woman who betrayed him and was his undoing. As the Mishnah says, he tended to go after his eyes, a very gevurah thing to do. Then he used his gevuros one more time while bound up in the Philistine temple, to pull down its pillars and crash the structure on those celebrating his demise.

Does this mean that Korach could have been a great man as well? Sort of. But he would have had to have worked very hard at it, because as the Arizal said, he didn't just come from the side of Gevurah, but from the evil side of Kayin. That's pretty evil. In fact, that is so bad that it is a wonder that Korach wasn't worse, which may have been to his credit in the end.

If so, this may explain something in the parsha that seems somewhat out of place. After Moshe Rabbeinu confidently challenged Korach and his followers to an Incense showdown, he uncharacteristically turned to God to ask Him to not show Korach any favor. He even went so far as to "remind" God how altruistically he was:

Moshe was very distressed, and he said to God, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not harmed a single one of them." (Bamidbar 16:15)

Okay...but why was he bringing this up now? What was Moshe worried about? That God would choose Korach over him? If that was a concern, shouldn't he have consulted with God first before making the challenge? If Moshe was that unsure about his decision or approach, shouldn't he have at least verified it before going out on a limb? Seemingly.

Almost every culture has some saying about not judging another until you are in their shoes. You don't have to be a Kabbalist to know that people are born with different natures, live very different lives, and have very different tests. Some people can't stand the idea of biting their nails while others can't keep their teeth off of them. Some of the differences might be a function of nurture, but they are definitely effected by nature.

The Midrash says that for the first 15 years, Ya'akov and Eisav weren't so different from each other. That is hard to believe only because of how different they became from that point onward. But it takes a while for the true nature of a person to emerge, and not just emerge but remain. Eisav's inherent nature was known from an early age, but it probably did not yet show up in everything he did.

But you see it all the time. At some stage teenagers gravitate to what makes them feel most comfortable about themselves, good or bad, and they develop the confidence to stick with it. If it is something they know is not so acceptable by their parents and teachers, they stop feeling the need to camouflage what they're like. Being true to themselves and acting out in the open can seem like rebellion to everyone else

but the people like them.

At one point, Eisav started being a bully and became known for it. He stole out in the open, and became known for it. Acting dishonorably became his accepted way of life, so he became known for it. This is why his own mother decided to usurp his right to the blessings and give them to Ya'akov instead.

Moshe was the greatest prophet to have ever lived. When he killed the Egyptian back in Egypt, he knew that the Egyptian had part of Kayin's unrectified soul in him. So he used a name of God to kill him, because that would rectify the soul spark. He probably even knew that he himself was the reincarnation of Hevel, and that his killing the Egyptian affected some kind of historic rectification for his original brother, Kayin.

Besides, being Moshe Rabbeinu, he thought in terms of the big picture. He knew everything that happened was a function of Providence, was historic, and had national ramifications, even if he could not see what they were at the moment. Ironically, if anyone could see Korach for who he really was, it was Moshe Rabbeinu, and that may have concerned him. Not because of how bad Korach was, but how good he may have been in God's eyes, respectively. Therefore, Moshe focused on his own merits to counterbalance those Korach may have had. ©2022 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

To demonstrate that Aaron was G-d's choice for high priest, G-d instructs Moshe to place twelve staffs inside the Kodesh Kodashim (Holy of Holies), each inscribed with the name of the tribe chieftain. The next day Aaron's staff grows almond blossoms with almonds (17:23). While commentaries explain that almonds grow quickly and thus are the fruit of choice for this divine proclamation, what is the purpose of conveying the seemingly superfluous fact that almond blossoms and buds grew along with the almonds?

Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that this was an additional message that G-d was sending to those involved and to us. Just like part of the growth of almonds includes blossoms, buds, and the ripe fruit, becoming a kohen gadol (high priest) does not just happen overnight, but is a gradual process. Perhaps the flower of the almond is symbolic of the beauty of the blossom above that of the fruit itself. Life is not about finding the shortcuts to reach greatness, but rather about embracing the process of improvement. If life is a journey, embrace every challenge and enjoy the ride. ©2022 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.

