

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Korach 5774

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein *A Generation Departs*

Time inexorably does its work. King Solomon ruefully pointed out that "Generations come and generations leave and yet the earth itself eternally remains." The generation that experienced World War II and the Holocaust Jews who lived through it is rapidly departing from our midst. At the seventieth D-Day commemorative ceremonies two weeks ago very few actual participants in that great venture could attend. And in the Jewish world, the ranks of the survivors of the Holocaust are thinned daily.

That fateful generation of human history is departing and though memory remains, the actual eyewitnesses and survivors of that time and those events are irrevocably gone. Such is the nature of the human condition of mortality. In the United States and perhaps in the United Kingdom and its then dominions as well, that wartime generation was and is viewed as being perhaps the most exemplary one of many other generations.

It was a generation of sacrifice and honor, loyalty and victory. It may truly deserve being viewed as the "finest hour" of Western democracy. I was and am a child of that generation. I remember the war vividly though it hardly affected me physically or even comfort-wise. Yet the mood in our house was tense and foreboding because a portion of my father's family that did not yet leave for the Land of Israel in the 1930's, when most of the rest of the family did so, remained in Lithuania. In our hearts we knew that they were doomed to destruction. And immediately after the war ended, our worst forebodings and fears were confirmed.

The Jewish world seventy years ago was a disaster, a spiritual wasteland in the main and a physically, emotionally and nationally challenged society. The survivors of the Holocaust were refugees and displaced persons. The doors to Palestine were barred to them by British intransigence and Arab violence. The Torah infrastructure laboriously constructed in Eastern Europe and in the Sephardic Middle East, over a millennia of study and creativity, was permanently eradicated.

Semi-official anti-Semitism in American businesses, universities and governmental agencies was pervasive. Jewry the world over thrashed about to find moorings and to somehow rebuild itself. The Cold War was upon us and millions of Jews now found themselves caged behind Stalin's Iron Curtain. In short, it certainly was not a happy time nor was there a positive prognosis for the future of the Jewish people or for the resurgence of Torah in its midst.

And yet all of this pessimism – then it was really realism – was confounded by the Jewish nation. Israel came into being and has flourished against all odds, implacable foes and a hostile world. Torah study has achieved unimaginable popularity and numbers in our time. Jews became more confident and rightfully self-assertive, rising to high achievements in finance and commerce, academia and scholarship of all kinds, as well as government and politics.

And, to a great extent all of this was due to the efforts and drive and talents of the broken remnants of Israel, the survivors of the Holocaust and the mellahs who rebuilt themselves and thereby the House of Israel as well.

I am reminded of all of this by the passing of my friend and congregant, Rabbi Dr. Armin Friedman this past week. A survivor of the Holocaust, left alone and bereft, he rebuilt his life with purpose and family, Torah and public service. He devoted his life to educating Jewish children in Torah and tradition and to give them the necessary tools for success in a competitive and changing world.

Though at times he spoke of the experiences of his youth in the camps he did not allow himself to be consumed by them. Though he questioned the circumstances that allowed the Holocaust, he never wavered in his loyalty to the God of Israel and to His Torah. He and many others like him of that heroic generation looked forward and he and they were determined to build a stronger Jewish world than even the one that had been so ruthlessly destroyed.

Building and teaching, helping and encouraging, these were the goals of his life, his justification of survival and of life itself. That was a generation of driven people, determined to rebuild and not succumb. And it is upon their attitudes and actions that our current generation and those generations that will yet follow will continue building and educating the Jewish world. Aristocratic, soft-spoken, determined and scholarly, he was a fine representative of his home and upbringing. But in his accomplishments against many obstacles after the Holocaust, we witnessed his true mettle and faith. The departure of that person and of his generation is a sad moment for all of us.

Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein *Korach*

In the entire biblical narrative of the sojourn of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, the tribe of Levi is not mentioned as being a participant in any of the rebellions and mutinies of the Jewish people against God and Moshe. The tribe of Levi stood firm in its faith and loyalty during the disaster of the Golden Calf and rallied to the side of Moshe to stem that tide of idolatry.

In the complaints mounted against Moshe and God about water and food, the tribe of Levi is not to be found. The tribe of Levi did not participate in the mission of the spies and explorers of the Land of Israel and there is opinion that it was not included in the decree that that generation would die in the desert and never see the Land of Israel. Yet this seemingly impeccable record is tarnished by the events described in this week's parsha.

Here, apparently, the tribe of Levi, through Korach and his supporters, are the leaders of a very serious rebellion against the authority of Moshe. Moshe himself is a Levite and when he criticizes the behavior of the tribe of Levi – "is it not enough for you to be the chosen servants of the Lord in your Levite status that you must insist that you will also be the priestly class of Israel?!" he certainly does so with heavy heart and great bitterness. In effect he is demanding to know what happened to turn the holy tribe of Levi into a rebellious group whose punishment would be their being swallowed up by the earth.

One of my favorite truisms in life is that one is never to underestimate the power of ego. The Great War of 1914-18 was in a great measure caused and driven by the egotistical whims of some of the main monarchs of Europe who were then in power. The Talmud records for us that the evil but potentially great King of Israel, Yeravam ben Nvat, was offered by God, so to speak, to stroll in Paradise alongside King David and God Himself, again, so to speak.

The Talmud tells us that Yeravam refused the offer because King David would have preference of place over him on that walk in Heaven. The message and moral that the Talmud means to convey with this story is how dangerous and tragic an inflated ego can be to one's self and, if one is in a position of leadership and authority it, may affect others as well.

Korach and the tribe of Levi fall victim to their inflated egos. Their sense of self is now far from reality and responsibility. One cannot be without ego and self-pride. Yet these attributes must be tempered by perspective, logic and a sense of loyalty and obedience to the word of God. That, in my opinion, is the basic lesson of this week's parsha.

Moshe's overriding sense of modesty diminishes the drive of his own ego and he is able to say "would that all of God's congregation could join me as prophets." Korach, consumed by his unjustly inflated ego, destroys himself and many others in his quest for positions that do not belong to him nor is he worthy of having.

Shabat shalom

The G'shmak of Gossip

"And Korach took..." (15:1)

Why do people talk about a "juicy" piece of gossip?

What does gossip taste like?

Gossip is very low in nutrition. It contains neither vitamins nor minerals. It doesn't do the consumer any good in this world (and certainly not in the next).

Quite recently there was a serious difference of opinion between two great Torah leaders. There is no doubt in my mind that their differences were totally for "the sake of Heaven" – altruistic and without personal interest of gain or prestige.

It amazed me, however, how every Tom, Dick, and Chaim suddenly started pontificating and vilifying the other side's Torah leader based on his own righteous indignation.

Gossip is so delicious, so juicy, because it allows us to feel that we — the tiny foot-soldiers of Judaism — too are "players". We're also in the Big League. Suddenly we become world-arbiters of both halacha and hashkafa (Torah law and philosophy).

Isn't that g'shmak? Isn't that juicy?

"And Korach took..." Targum Onkelos translates this phrase as, "He removed himself." "He removed himself from the rest of the congregation by sustaining a dispute." (Rashi)

The Mishna in Avot (5:17) comments, "What is a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai."

Only the giants of each generation, like Hillel and Shammai, may allow themselves a dispute for the sake of Heaven. We, small beings that we are, must distance ourselves not only from selfish and sordid rows, but also from those disagreements that seem to us pure and altruistic.

For, without doubt, we will not be able to resist the g'shmak of gossip and slander.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Chaim M'Volozhin as quoted in Iturei Torah

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Korach

Korach separated himself. (16:1)

Vayikach Korach, "Korach separated himself": two words that define what was to become one of the greatest tragedies of Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, the consequences of which we continue to live with to this very day. Dispute, controversy and machlokes have been present since Korach publicized the concept of dissent, taking it to an unprecedented nadir, which incurred previously unheard of punishment - unparalleled for its severity and finality. All of this happened because "Korach separated himself." Obviously, there is more than one meaning to Korach's separating himself. We will address the opinion of Rashi, because its simplicity is unusually profound, teaching a significant moral lesson.

Lokach es atzmo l'tzad echad liheyos nechelok mitoch ha'eidah l'orer al haKehunah. Korach "Took himself off to one side, to be separated from the assembly of Yisrael by raising objections to the Kehunah." Rashi adds that this is what Targum Onkeles means when he interprets Vayikach Korach as V'ispaleig, "And he separated himself." Rashi then adds how he separated himself - l'hachazik b'machlokes, "by sustaining a dispute." Rashi seems to imply that the critique against Korach was that he sustained the dispute. Apparently, its origins were not that blameworthy. It was continuing when he was proven wrong, when Moshe explained to him that he was making an egregious error.

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, quotes the well-known Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:17), which distinguishes between a machlokes l'shem Shomayim, a dispute for the sake of Heaven, and one which is not for the sake of

Heaven. The paradigm of controversy for the glory of Heaven is the dispute of Hillel and Shammai, two distinguished Tannaim, who disputed halachah a number of times; yet, each one permitted members of his individual household to marry one another. It was "friendly fire", with each disputant seeking one thing: to establish halachah, thereby glorifying Hashem's Name. The paradigmatic example of a machlokes which is not l'shem Shomayim is that of Korach and his followers.

Perusing this Mishnah makes one wonder. Is l'shem Shomayim the only area of divergence between Korach's dispute and the halachic debates of Hillel and Shammai? Is there no other area in which these two machlokes, disputes, differ? How can we even mention Korach's blatant mutiny, his rebellion against Hashem's designated leaders, and, by extension, against Hashem Himself, in the same breath as the holy names of Hillel and Shammai. Apparently, as Rav Yeruchem notes, there is a much deeper understanding of Korach's dispute with which we must reconcile ourselves. Korach was not out simply to usurp Moshe's leadership. It was not only about seeking honor, fame and glory. Korach initially wanted a higher position that meant greater closeness to Hashem. This is what he sought - initially.

Thus, at the very onset, Korach was truly no different than Hillel and Shammai. They had a religious agenda; so did Korach. The problem arose when Korach was proven wrong, when Moshe explained everything to him, when he revealed to him some of the rationale behind Hashem's "decisions." This is when Korach should have said, "Ok, I am wrong. I will no longer dispute the decision. Hashem has spoken." Sadly, he did not do that. He was machzik b'machlokes, continued to sustain the dispute, to transform a serious rational debate into an ugly battle. Korach's question was acceptable. His eschewing the answer, his inability to accept and acquiesce to a Higher Power, is what brought him down.

Korach's followers experienced a similar error. Perhaps they all had good intentions, but, when one is proven wrong; when one blatantly sees the folly of his ways, he must be a total imbecile to continue. This is what Moshe told them when they agreed to offer the incense: Rav lachem, Bnei Levi, "This is to you, sons of Levi!" (ibid 16:7). Rashi explains, "I have told you a serious matter. Were they not fools? For Moshe warned them in this manner. Yet, they still undertook to offer the incense." What prompted them to act so foolishly - basically rejecting their lives?

Rav Yeruchem quotes an analogy from Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl. A thirsty man who had been looking for water to soothe his parched throat finally chanced upon a keg of water. A large group of people assembled there confirmed that the water was fresh and perfectly drinkable. Nonetheless, if one person who appears deranged comes along and warns him not to drink from the water because there is poison in it, he will not drink. This is despite everyone's agreement that the water is fine. If one person - and one who is, at best, totally deranged - claims that the water is poisonous, no rational person will drink from it. That is the way it is.

Likewise, with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. A person convinces himself that there is no one in charge. He can go about his daily endeavors as he sees fit. What should he worry about? But just in case they are wrong, and Hashem will punish you for your sin, will you still continue to drink the water? You will - if you are a fool. This is what Moshe was saying to them: "Gentlemen, you were at the funerals of Nadav and Avihu, where you observed the immediate devastating response to offering incense without being commanded to do so. Are you willing to risk your lives? Are you normal?!"

They stood before Moshe with two hundred and fifty men from Bnei Yisrael, leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown. (16:2)

The two hundred and fifty men that rallied with Korach were not ordinary people. They were from among Klal Yisrael's spiritual elite. This, of course, did not prevent them from making the mistake of their lives. Perhaps their distinguished position, thinking themselves infallible, might have led to the error which cost them their lives. No one should think that he is above reproach. One who does is in serious trouble. Who were these two hundred and fifty men? Rashi claims that they were all from the Tribe

of Reuven. Ibn Ezra, however, contends that they were representatives of all of the tribes. He posits that when the bechorim, firstborn, were demoted and exchanged for Shevet Levi, some among them felt slighted. They were the ones who joined Korach's rebellion. The numbers, however, do not seem to correspond. Certainly, there were more than two hundred and fifty misplaced bechorim.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh says that during the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moshe Rabbeinu called *Mi l'Hashem eilai*, "Who is for Hashem, should stand by me!" all of Shevet Levi joined, and individual members of the other tribes also came forth. Applying the interpretation of the Ohr HaChaim, the nation understands why such a small group of bechorim joined the fray. Those who did not stand by Moshe felt that they did not deserve preferential treatment. They had been given their chance, and they chose to ignore it. The two hundred and fifty were those who had joined Shevet Levi in support of Moshe. They now wanted recognition for their valiant and dedicated efforts to stand up to the Golden Calf sinners. They were not a large group, but ones who felt they deserved a position of spiritual leadership.

Regardless of their earlier allegiance, their present support of Korach over Moshe cost them their lives. Where did they go wrong? Horav Moshe Tzvi Nariyah, zl, explains that it all reverts back to their attitude when they responded to Moshe's call. *Mi l'Hashem - elai* represents two statements: "Who is for Hashem?"; "should stand by me." These bechorim accepted the *Mi l'Hashem*; they were one with the Almighty. They were, however, not prepared to commit to the *eilai*, to "me." They were prepared to die for Hashem, to sacrifice their lives in order to demonstrate their devotion to Him. They were not yet prepared to accept Moshe as their leader. At that point, it did not present a glaring problem. At the nadir of the dispute, however, it revealed itself in all of its repugnance. When one makes a commitment, he must do so wholeheartedly; when he is "in," he should be completely in. Otherwise, later on, when challenges present themselves and the "going gets tough," his lack of full

commitment will manifest itself in his downfall.

Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem? (16:3)

In his commentary to Sefer Yechezkel (18:6), Radak writes that once a Jew, always a Jew. "There is a covenant between Hashem and Klal Yisrael, stating that those who are descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov (who are of the Patriarchal lineage) will never cease their commitment to Judaism. Those, however, who, over time, apostatized themselves and reneged on their faith in Hashem had never been real descendants of the Patriarchs. They are the offspring of the *asafuf*, those insincere individuals who attached themselves to the Jewish People."

In his *Igeres Teiman*, the Rambam makes a similar statement: "Those who stood at Har Sinai, experiencing the Revelation, will always believe in the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu. This applies to them, their children and their children's children, forever. For Hashem said to Moshe, 'And they will forever believe in you.' Therefore, one should know that anyone who turns away from the religion that was established at this gathering (the Revelation) is not a descendant of theirs." In other words, Rambam reiterates that one who eschews Judaism, who turns his back on Hashem, who becomes an apostate, is not *mi'zera Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov*. He neither descended from the Patriarchal lineage, nor did his ancestors stand at Har Sinai.

The question is now quite obvious: What about Korach? He certainly did not descend from a newcomer to the Jewish faith. No one can dispute his illustrious lineage. Nonetheless, he disputed Moshe's leadership, claiming that Hashem did not choose him. Can there be any greater - more blatant - display of heresy than this? This question was posed to the Gerrer Rebbe, the Imrei Emes, zl, by his son-in-law.

The Rebbe replied that, indeed, Korach knew and believed in Hashem. He was, however, one who is considered a prime example of: *yodea es Boro u'miskaven limrod Bo*, "He knows and acknowledges his Creator, yet maliciously intends to rebel against Him." This is a new dimension in *kefirah*, heresy. One knows what he is doing. He is aware and believes in Hashem, but this does not affect him. He could care less. He will rebel

against his Creator because he wants to! Korach sought *kavod*, glory. As long as Moshe stood at the helm of Jewish leadership, Korach was relegated to a secondary position. This was something this despot could not live with - even if it meant mutinying against the Almighty.

The Steipler Gaon, Horav Yisrael Yaakov Kanievsky, zl, gives a different answer to this question. The Rambam's position that once a Jew, always a Jew (and a Jew that reneges his Judaism had never actually been a Jew by birth lineage) applies only when nothing is in his way, nothing to distort his belief, nothing to undermine his conviction. He, of his own volition, took a philosophical approach to Judaism. In accordance with his way of thinking, he feels that the religion is unjustifiable, and, therefore, he rejects it. He did not see the miracles and wonders which are recorded in the Torah. If he did not see it, and if he cannot understand it, then he does not believe it. Such a person is not one of us - period. A Jew, however, who has sinned and fallen under the malignant spell of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, and is thus led to heresy is nothing more than a Jewish sinner. He is one of us - a sorry case - but one of us nonetheless.

This was Korach. He could not deal with his envy. His jealousy over Moshe's position of leadership destroyed him, making him act in the reprehensible manner that he did. Korach was a Jewish renegade - but a Jew nonetheless.

And Moshe heard and fell on his face. (16:4)

Moshe Rabbeinu had heard it all. This was the final straw. As Rashi explains, *She'kvar zeh b'yadam sirchon revii*, "This was already the fourth foulness that the Jews had committed." They had worshipped the Golden Calf - after which Moshe prayed for them. They were *misonenim*, complained for no good reason, just for the sake of complaining; again, Moshe prayed for them. They heeded the false and slanderous reports of the *meraglim*, spies, and wept bitterly for no reason; Moshe again prayed for them. This was the fourth time that the nation had defied Hashem. It was too much. Moshe felt that he could no longer plead their case. They had gone too far. This can be compared to the son of the king who acted contemptuously, once, twice, and a third time. When the son disgraced himself and the king for a fourth time, the king's close friend who had interceded the previous three times felt that his ability had weakened: "How many times could he trouble the king? Perhaps he will no longer accept my placation?"

This all might be fine and well if there were no rhyme or reason to somehow justify the first three episodes of disgrace. As Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, observes, however, each sinful event presented itself with what Klal Yisrael might excuse as mitigating or extenuating circumstances. During the episode of the Golden Calf, the Satan played a leading role in confusing the nation, attempting to convince them by employing a convincing imagery of darkness and cloud, with Moshe's *bier* being carried through Heaven by the Angels. The complainers were victims of the *eirav rav*, mixed multitude, who joined the Jewish nation as they left Egypt. They were nothing but trouble. Once again, they succeeded in wrongly influencing the nation to complain for no reason. The spies were powerful leaders who had an overriding negative influence on an anxious and troubled nation. If they had an excuse for every episode, why should they now be censured because it is the fourth time? Why count the preceding three?

In his inimitable manner, Rav Galinsky takes a practical approach toward resolving this question. He recalls being *Mashgiach* in a *yeshivah* and questioning a student concerning his lack of attendance at davening, morning prayers. "Why were you not at davening this morning?" was his opening question. "I attended a wedding last night and returned quite late. I was exhausted, so I slept in," the student responded.

"That explains today - what happened yesterday that prevented you from joining us at davening?" Rav Galinsky asked. "Interestingly, yesterday I arose early and would surely have been on time, had I not been delayed by my stomach. I must have eaten something that disagreed with me" was the young man's reply.

"What about the day before yesterday?" he asked somewhat impatiently. "Yesterday is a different story. I woke up on time, but I noticed that my negel vasser, water for washing my hands upon arising, had been moved from my bed. Aware of the halachah that prohibits one from walking daled amos, four cubits, without removing the spiritual impurities caused by sleep, I felt that I should wait in bed until someone returning from davening would move the water to my bed." This was truly a creative excuse - but an excuse nonetheless.

Rav Galinsky told the young man, "Let us together study a passage in the Talmud Chagigah 3b. Perhaps we might gain insight into your davening issue and how your lack of attendance should be addressed. Chazal explain that the shoteh, imbecile, about whom halachah rules that he is patur, exempt from mitzvah performance, is defined by specific actions. To rule that one is a shoteh has strong ramifications: no mitzvos, no punishment for transgressions; his kinyan, acquisition, is not acceptable; what he sells is null and void. Thus, Chazal were specific in delineating the criteria for declaring one a shoteh. They are: he goes out alone at night, with no concern for his well-being; he sleeps alone in the cemetery; he tears his clothes. In other words, he exhibits strange behavior which indicates that he cares about neither himself nor his possessions.

"The Talmud explains that one who sleeps in the cemetery might actually be seeking an opportunity for a ruach ha'tumah, spirit of impurity, to rest upon him granting him the ability to practice witchcraft or other practices of the occult. One who goes out alone at night might need to get some cool air. Last, tearing clothes could suggest absentmindedness. Each one alone does not irrevocably indicate that one is a shoteh. All three together, however, demonstrate that this person has serious issues."

Chazal seem to imply that three occurrences, regardless of the excuses one presents, are an indication which connotes chazakah, status quo. Likewise, imagine a man who goes to the doctor complaining of a headache, high fever, and blisters all over his body. A foolish doctor will treat each symptom exclusive of the other, while an astute doctor will realize immediately that one illness, an infection, manifests all three symptoms.

Returning to Moshe Rabbeinu: True, each infraction could be justified, but three, one after another, constitutes a chazakah, indicating a deeper sickness, one which cannot be ignored. This was no longer opportunity for prayer. They had shown that their spiritual illness was of an extremely serious nature. It had to be expunged in such a manner that radical punishment was the only way to eradicate the spiritual infection that was destroying the nation.

And put fire in them and place incense upon them. Then the man whom Hashem will choose - he is the holy one. It is too much for you, O offspring of Levi. (16:7)

Rashi asks a simple, but piercing, question: Korach was far from a fool. Indeed, he was well-known as a pikeach, wise, intelligent man. If so, what did he see that motivated him to commit to such a foolish act? He knew that there could be only one winner. Offering Ketores, incense, was not child's play. It had to be done correctly by the right person, or else the person who offered it became history. Only a fool would risk so much. Korach certainly was no fool.

We wonder why Rashi asks this question with regard to the Ketores. Why not raise the issue of what prompted Korach to take on Moshe Rabbeinu immediately, at the beginning of the parsha when Korach initiated the dispute? What motivated Korach to act this way? He was numbered among the ones who carried the holy Aron HaKodesh. He was one of the most prominent citizens of Klal Yisrael. To act in this manner runs counter to everything that Korach represented and stood for. Indeed, it would make sense to ask the question of Korach right from the beginning, when a member of the nation's spiritual elite chose to defile himself by impugning Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen's leadership.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, explains with a simple answer, expressing a profound verity which sadly holds true today - more often than we care to admit. A tzaddik, righteous person, is not perfect. It is possible for a tzaddik to err. To err is human; to ignore one's error is unforgivable and

indicates that one is witless. Korach could have made a mistake. He was envious of Moshe, and envy causes a person to do strange things - even sin reprehensibly. As long as Korach's actions could be defined as sinful, it could be "understood." It was when he acted insensate, like a fool driven by idiocy, that we ask, "How could he commit such shtus, foolishness?" He knew that all but one of the two hundred and fifty incense renderers would die; yet, he committed himself to the test anyway. This shows that Korach had become unhinged. He was acting without seichel, common sense. That is inexcusable! To paraphrase the Rosh Yeshivah, Veil di greste aveirah iz tzu zein a naar, "Because the greatest sin is to be a fool." Now, some people cannot help themselves. They are born that way. When one is born with the gift of common sense, yet refuses to apply it, then his actions are unpardonable. We are blessed with a working mind for the purpose of using it. To act foolishly, ignoring the directive of common sense, may not be condoned.

A Torah leader, or anyone, for that matter, who possesses seichel hayashar, straight, common sense, has no excuse for making nonsensical mistakes - especially if his mindlessness hurts others. Torah scholarship is important, commendable and is to be respected. If one possesses everything but common sense, however, he - and everyone connected with him - is in serious trouble.

The Torah teaches that when Moshe was judging the entire nation by himself, his father-in-law, Yisro, suggested that he set up leaders over various groups. Yisro suggested four attributes that would qualify the one who possessed them for leadership: anshei chayil, men of means, who have no need to flatter or show recognition; yirei Elokim, G-d-fearing people; anshei emes, men of truth, who inspire confidence and whose words are worthy of being relied upon; sonei betza, people who despise money who hate to have their money in litigation, willing to part with their money, rather than go to court to argue over what is truthfully and rightfully theirs. Apparently, these traits were indicative of highly, upstanding individuals; it was a tall list of attributes to all fit one person. The Torah tells us that, in the end, Moshe chose anshei chayil, men of accomplishment, men of means, as his judges. Ostensibly, when he had to choose among all four attributes, the one that was most im-

portant was anshei chayil. This does not mean that the judges did not possess the other qualities. It only means that they did not exemplify them. Thus, when Moshe had to make the decision, he felt that anshei chayil was the most crucial characteristic for a judge and a leader.

The definition of anshei chayil which was rendered above, men of means, follows Rashi. Sforno, however, adds to this definition, suggesting that anshei chayil means more than being able to transcend the need to impress and flatter, to curry favor from people. Anshei chayil is the quality of mevin davar mitoch davar, someone who is able to discern the veracity of a matter and bring it to a definitive conclusion. They were chosen even over those who were G-d-fearing, but they were not "able men."

Sforno views "ability" as the most important quality which a leader/judge should possess. It is vital that he be well-versed in the law, astute and capable of rendering a decision. The anshei chayil were scholars who were knowledgeable and of a strong character, although lacking in some of the other qualities which Yisro felt a leader should possess. Apparently, if they could not have it all, they settled for what was crucial - men of ability, who could think through a problem and render a decision.

In the Shiurei Daas, Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl, develops this idea further. He posits that to serve Hashem properly, one must be astute, developing a profundity of the mitzvos and the manner in which a Jew should serve Hashem. A "thinking" Jewish scholar, who is knowledgeable and understands the depth and veracity, the wisdom and sagacity of Torah - who fears Hashem out of a sense of perception and intelligence - is greater than he who is extremely meticulous and follows the letter of the law with care and fear, but without insight and depth. The chacham, wise man, who is capable of developing insight into the verities of Torah, who achieves Heavenly fear through a depth of understanding of before Whom he stands, has a greater potential for spiritual growth than he who fears, but lacks intellectual perfection. To put it in the simple vernacular: common

sense is a critical, indispensable requisite for life, without which one is incapable of rendering a decision. A leader who is lacking in this most basic quality is not only personally in a precarious position, but he may also present a serious danger to all.

Va'ani Tefillah

V'limadetem osam es b'neichem.

And you shall teach it to your sons.

The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 50:3) writes that one who studies Torah without understanding what he is studying does not fulfill the mitzvah of limud haTorah. The principle of Torah study requires that one understands what he learns. No cognition - no mitzvah. In his Pirkei Torah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, quotes his son-in-law, Horav Ephraim Eisenberger, zl, who questioned this halachah because of its inconsistency with a statement made by Chazal in Meseches Succah. They say that as soon as a child is able to articulate words, his father should commence his Torah studies. He begins with the pasuk: Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, "The Torah which Moshe commanded us" (Devarim 33:4). Clearly, such a young child has no sense of understanding. How can his father be commanded to teach him Torah?

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that teaching one's son Torah is part of the mitzvah of chinuch, educating one's child. This mitzvah imperes one to see to it that his child become proficient in the mitzvah by getting used to it. Practice makes perfect. In order for the child to become familiar with the mitzvah, he must practice it, make it user friendly. Cogency applies later on when he begins to study Torah as part of the mitzvah of limud haTorah.

Sponsored by The Klahr Family (New York) In loving memory of our grandparents Phillip and Lillian Finger who were long-time friends and family of the Hebrew Academy.

li"n R' Zalman Fishel ben R' Chanina Halevi a"h Maras Ettel Leah bas R' Yeshaya Halevi a"h t.n.t.z.v.h.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column

korach: "two jews, three opinions"

We all nod our heads in agreement when we hear the phrase, "Two Jews, three opinions." We similarly chuckle when we hear the anecdote about the Jew who was discovered after years of living alone on a desert island. His rescuers noticed that he had built two huts aside from the one he lived in. He told the puzzled people who saved him that they were shuls, or synagogues. When asked why he needed two shuls, he retorted, "One is the one in which I pray, and the other is the one into which I would never set foot."

We have no trouble believing that Jews tend to be contentious and have to express their disagreements with others, even when stranded alone on a desert island. The question that must be asked is whether or not this contentiousness is a good thing.

Long ago, one could find unanimity among wise men about certain values. Everyone consented that wisdom, diligence, and harmony were values worthy of acclaim. Then a great philosopher, Erasmus, came along wrote a book entitled *In Praise of Folly*. No longer could proponents of wisdom pretend that everyone agreed with them.

More recently, the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell wrote an essay entitled *In Praise of Idleness*. Gone from the list of universally held virtues were diligence and hard work.

What about concepts such as peace and harmony? Have they also suffered the fate of the aforementioned values? Have people begun to believe that contentiousness and argumentativeness, if not outright strife, are to be extolled?

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32), provides the occasion to reflect on just such questions. Korach is the biblical paradigm of the contentious individual. He is, to say the least, dissatisfied with Moses' leadership style and calls into question the entire social hierarchy with which he was confronted. According to the rabbis, he was even skeptical of various rituals, not being able to accept that a house

full of holy books required a mezuzah, or that a tallit made entirely of blue colored wool required tzitzit with the blue colored fringe.

He had no difficulty finding contentious companions, and he eventually organized them into a band of rebels and fomented a full-fledged revolt against the authority of Moses and Aaron.

For the rabbis of the Talmud, Korach epitomizes the negative trait of machloket, strife and discord. A famous passage in Ethics of the Fathers distinguishes between legitimate disputes, those which are "for the sake of heaven," and those which are not so motivated. They add: "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." The former type of dispute has enduring value. The latter does not.

From this passage it is apparent that our sages do not categorically oppose dispute, debate, and argument. Rather, everything depends upon the motive. If the motive is a noble one, "for the sake of heaven," then debate is not only tolerated but it is considered valuable. If the motive is ignoble, and certainly if it is merely contentious, it is strongly condemned.

An example of such a harsh condemnation is to be found in the Midrash on this week's Torah portion. The Midrash points out how each of the letters comprising the word machloket represents a different vile trait. Thus, the first letter, mem, stands for makkah, wound. The letter chet stands for charon, wrath. The letter lamed begins the word lakui, smitten. The letter kuf represents klala, curse. The final letter tav stands for tachlit, which is often translated as goal or objective, but in this context means a final tragic ending.

But just as much as improperly motivated disputes were condemned by our sages, so did they find value in disputes which had a constructive purpose. They particularly appreciated disputes which were motivated by the search for truth. Hence, hardly a page in the thousands of pages of the Talmud does not record strong differences of opinion between the rabbis.

It is noteworthy in this regard that every single chapter of the work known as the Mishnah, which is the core around which the Talmud developed, contains a dispute between the rabbis on one point or another. The only exception to this is the fifth chapter of the tractate Zevachim, "Ayzahu mekoman," which begins with the question, "What is the location for the Temple sacrifices?" No dispute at all is recorded in this unique chapter. Yet this is the chapter chosen for inclusion in the daily prayer book. It has been argued that it is precisely this chapter, which is devoid of even a trace of contentiousness, that merited inclusion in our sacred liturgy.

An objection has been raised to the criterion "for the sake of heaven" as a legitimate motive for dispute. Surely men have been motivated to commit horrible evil because they believed they were acting "for the sake of heaven." One of the strongest arguments raised by freethinkers against religion is the fact that so much blood has been spilled over the millennia by people who were convinced that they were performing God's will.

It is to counter such an objection that the rabbis gave as an example of an appropriate dispute the machloket between Hillel and Shammai. The disagreements between these two sages, and their disciples down through the generations, were characterized by tolerance and friendship. So much so that the Talmud records more than one incident when Hillel came around to Shammai's way of thinking, and when Shammai conceded to Hillel.

The disputes between Hillel and Shammai endure to this very day. Although we generally rule in accordance with the opinion of the former, we carefully attended to the arguments of the latter. I for one am convinced that we do so to perpetuate the attitudes of attentiveness and harmony which both Hillel and Shammai advocated and enacted.

Students of Torah must not only study the content of these ancient disputes. They must also learn to re-create the atmosphere which prevailed among the disputants, an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect and a willingness to concede one's original position in order to achieve the truth.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Servant Leadership

“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 community 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.[1]

They were equally right to say, “God is with them.” That was the point of the making of the Tabernacle: “have them make Me sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Ex. 25: 8). Exodus ends with the 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 be. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled.[2]

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. He serves the people, and he serves 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 a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3).

The name to this is servant leadership,[3] 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 Tanakh as a whole. Only one other leader merits the same description: Joshua, who is described this way twice.

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 the him 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’ (Psalm 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 honor 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’ (Exodus 16:8). He should bear the nation’s difficulties, burdens, complaints and anger as a nurse carries an infant.[4]

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.”[5] 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.[6] 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].’[7] As Martin Luther King once said “Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve.”

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.

[1] Some suggest that the mistake they made 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.

[2] Aristotle, Politics, Book 1, 1254a21-24.

[3] 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.

[4] *Hilkhot Melakhim* 2: 6.

[5] *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3: 13.

[6] *Berakhot* 27b.

[7] *Horayot* 10a-b.

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Drasha Parshas Korach

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Stick Figures

The chronology of complaining and retribution in this week's portion is not only disheartening, it seems almost endless. First, there is the terrible Korach rebellion where this prince of Israel challenges the authority of his cousins, Moshe and Ahron. A group of the 250 rabble-rousers are consumed by fire after offering the spiritually volatile k'tores sacrifice. Korach and his close cohorts are swallowed alive as the earth opened its mouth. Then the remaining group complained, and again there was a plague. Ahron had to actually tender the feared k'tores offering and walk through the camp in order to quell the Heavenly epidemic. And again the Jews complained. Finally, to establish the Divinity of Mosaic leadership and Ahron's Priestly role, Hashem commanded Moshe to perform the ultimate sign.

"Speak to the Children of Israel and take from them one staff for each father's house, from all their leaders according to their fathers' house, twelve staffs; each man's name shall you inscribe on his staff: And the name of Aaron shall you inscribe on the staff of Levi, for there shall be one staff for the head of their fathers' house: It shall be that the man whom I shall choose -- his staff will blossom; thus, I shall cause to subside from upon Me the complaints of the Children of Israel, which they complain against you. Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a staff for each leader, a staff for each leader, according to their fathers' house, twelve staffs; and Aaron's staff was among their staffs. Moshe laid their staffs before Hashem in the Tent of the Testimony. On the next day, Moshe came to the Tent of the Testimony and behold! The staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and allmonds ripened.

"Moshe brought out all the staffs from before Hashem to all the Children of Israel; they saw and they took, each man his staff." (Numbers 17:16-24) A question I discussed last year seems glaring. Of what importance is it that the other princes took their sticks back. Also, why did the other princes take their sticks back. Of what value to them were those sticks, each being the same dry piece of wood?

Last week my wife and I shared the goodness of Hashem's blessings. My wife gave birth to a baby boy. As what has become almost a ritual with all my previous children, I visited my wife in the hospital together with all the newborn's siblings, (those who are home and not studying away in Yeshiva). After leaving my wife's room and our newborn son, my children stopped to peer through the large glass window of the infant nursery. All the newborns were lined up in their plastic bassinets. My older girls scanned the room "How adorable!" they whispered, balancing the excitement of the miraculous spectacle with proper hospital decorum.

My older daughters' murmuring were muffled by the "I wanna see, I wanna see" coming a few feet below from my three-year old who was too small to reach the window of the nursery.

I picked him up and he looked curiously from wall to wall at the twenty-five newborns who were each in their separate compartments.

"Hey, it's all the same thing!" he declared.

Perhaps, in defeat, in realizing that you are not endowed with greater power, one must still realize that he still has his own identity. Even if he looks outwardly exactly like all his cohorts, there is a unique character that makes him special. And those special attributes must be seized as well.

True, Ahron's stick bloomed, while the others remained stagnant. But that is no reason to ignore them. And though they all may appear as the "same thing", their owners knew that each one had a quality, a nuance, a growth pattern or a certain form that was unique to them. They may not have been blooming sticks, they may not have sprouted almonds or yielded fruit, but to their owners they were unique! And each prince came back to reclaim not only what was his, but what was his to cherish as well.

Good Shabbos

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Korach

The Power of Prayer

Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon were challenged by Korach and his followers. Moshe set up a test to determine who was the Divinely chosen High Priest authorized to do Hashem's service in the Mishkan. Moshe challenged Korach and his 250 followers to compete with Aharon in eliciting Divine response to their individual Ketores offerings before Hashem. However, before suggesting this competition, Moshe Rabbeinu first prayed to Hashem that He not accept the Ketores offerings of Korach and his followers: "...Do not turn to their gift offering..." [Bamidbar 16:15]. The Ramban adds that Moshe did not only pray that the Ketores offering of this group not be accepted, he also prayed that even their prayers and supplications should be ignored.

We can really wonder – was that really necessary? Was it really important for Moshe Rabbeinu to beseech the Almighty NOT to listen to their prayers? Would we assume that had they in fact prayed to Hashem to support them in their rebellion against Moshe and Aharon that G-d would have listened to their prayers?

After all, this was already a "done deal" from the original six days of creation. The Mishna states [Avos 5:6] that the "mouth of the earth" destined to swallow up Korach and his followers was one of ten items created at dusk on the first Erev Shabbos of Creation. This thing was "in the bag" from time immemorial. There was no way that they were going to win their argument with Moshe and Aharon. So why in the world did Moshe need to pray to the Almighty "Don't listen to their prayers"?

Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm says we see from over here that we should never underestimate the power of prayer no matter who it comes from. This is an idea we have stressed many times over the years. In spite of the fact that creation was pre-programmed to have "a mouth" ready to swallow Korach and his followers, the prayers of these people – had they been sincere – could have been effective. Such is the power of prayer that even when offered by people who are wicked, when the prayers flow sincerely from the depths of their soul, they have power. Knowing that, Moshe Rabbeinu felt compelled to daven: "Don't listen to their prayers!"

The same concept is seen even more dramatically from a famous Mishna in Tractate Makkos [2:6]. The Talmud teaches that one who killed unintentionally must confine himself to the City of Refuge until the Kohen Gadol dies. We thus can imagine that we would have the entire community of the City of Refuge praying on a daily basis that the Kohen Gadol should drop dead. Only in that way would all the unintentional killers residing there be able to achieve their freedom. In order to prevent such prayers, the Mishna teaches that the mothers of the High Priests used to prepare packages of goodies – food and clothing -- for these murderers so that they have mercy on them and their sons and not pray that the High Priest should die.

The Gemara there asks, "So what if we have a full community of murderers getting up every day and cursing the Kohen Gadol? Why should such an unjustified prayer be accepted?" The Talmud Bavli gives one answer. However the Talmud Yerushalmi gives a different answer. The Yerushalmi distinguishes between a curse and a prayer. A worthless curse will not be effective; however a sincere prayer is not to be dismissed. Even a Tefilla from a murderer against a High Priest can be effective. Such is the power of prayer.

With this approach, Rav Meir Bergman, answers a question we discussed recently. The Talmud [Brachos 10a] relates that a group of gangsters was harassing Rav Meir and he prayed that they should die. Rav Meir's wife, Beruria, advised him that rather than pray that they die, he should instead pray that they repent and not hassle him anymore. The Talmud concludes that he prayed that they repent and in fact they did repent.

The Maharsha asks a fundamental question on this Gemara. How could Rav Meir pray that someone else repent? Teshuva is dependent on a person's free will (Bechira Chofshis)! It is dependent totally on a person's own initiative such that prayers for Divine intervention to bring about Teshuva should be completely inapplicable. Various answers have been given to this question. Rav Bergman shares an amazing idea: Tefilla trumps Bechira. Prayer wins out over the principle of Freedom of Choice. The power of prayer is so strong that in spite of the fact that most of the

time, the world operates on the principle of Bechira Chofshis, Tefilla is such a force that it can even overwhelm the concept of Free Choice.

With this premise, Rav Bergman explains a famous Gemara [Moed Katan 18b]. The Gemara says that a person is allowed to become engaged to a woman even during the Nine Days, when we are supposed to restrict joyous celebrations. The Talmud justifies this leniency by citing the fear "lest someone else get engaged to her first." The Talmud then questions this fear based on the well-established principle of 'basherte': The Talmud teaches that "forty days before the formation of an embryo, a Heavenly Voice goes forth and proclaims, 'the daughter of so and so will be married to so and so.'" In other words, it is predestined who a person is going to marry. So how is it possible if I am destined to become married to such and such a girl that someone else will be able to beat me to the punch and get engaged to her first? The Talmud answers "Lest someone else get engaged to her first through mercy (b'Rachamim)". In other words, the other person will daven and his prayers will be answered and they will overturn the Heavenly Decree that had predetermined this girl was destined for someone else!

This is the same idea as expressed above. The power of prayer can work against a Tzadik! The power of prayer can work to overwhelm something that was preprogrammed from the Six Days of Creation! The power of prayer can work against Bechira Chofshis! The power of prayer can work against 'basherte'! Such is the power of sincere prayer.

Why Did Elazar Get The Assignment Of Making The Fire Pan Memorial?

The challenge of Korach and his followers to the choice of Aharon as High Priest ended in disaster. The Ketores offering competition culminated with a fire that came out from Heaven consuming the 250 individuals who were challenging Aharon's designation as Kohen Gadol [Bamidbar 16:35].

What happened to their fire pans? G-d told Moshe to command Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, to take the fire pans and make them into thinned-out sheets as a covering for the Altar. The Me'am Loez asks why it was specifically Elazar who was given this task. After all, the challenge was to the Kehunah of Aharon. The logical thing would have been to have Aharon himself -- who emerged victorious in this struggle with the 250 challengers -- take the fire pans and make the appropriate adornment for the Altar. Why was Elazar given this job?

The Me'am Loez quotes a commentary called Kesef Mezuak, who makes a very sensitive observation here: Had Aharon been given this commandment, the first thing that would have come to mind when he picked up the burnt fire pans was that his two eldest sons -- Nadav and Avihu -- also tragically died in a very similar fashion, when they offered the Ketores on a fire pan. He might be troubled by the dichotomy. Why was it that their fire pans were not used to become part of the Beis HaMikdash? Why was a memorial being created for future generations with the fire pans of these wicked men and no such memorial was created with the fire pans of his sons?

The answer is that the fire pans of Nadav and Avihu were totally sinful. They were not commanded at all to offer Ketores ("...and they offered before Hashem a foreign fire that He did not command them" [Vayikra 10:1]). In the case of the fire pans of the 250 supporters of Korach, they were at least commanded by G-d to bring them (as a means of being able to Divinely designate the true Kohen Gadol).

Aharon would have had to relive the entire pain of what happened to his sons and be reminded that his sons acted totally without Divine license to offer the Ketores and consequently their fire pans were discarded. To save Aharon that pain, G-d said "Let Elazar do this, rather than Aharon." Such is the sensitivity of the Ribono shel Olam.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Parshat Korach: Constructive and destructive disputes By Shmuel Rabinowitz

Thu, Jun 19, 2014 21 Sivan, 5774

How, then, can disputes be utilized for their constructive attributes, without allowing the destructive ones to influence us?

In this week's parsha, Korach, we encounter one of the most common phenomena in humanity -- disputes.

Is an argument positive or negative? At first glance at this parsha, disputes are completely negative phenomena. As the story goes, Korach, along with 250 men, organized a rebellion against the leader of the Jewish nation, Moses, and demanded to have him replaced.

By whom? By Korach himself, of course, a respected and wealthy man.

After negotiating with the rebels, Moses discovers there is no room for compromise -- they are going for the whole package. Aware that he has no right to give up his God-given job, Moses turns to the nation and recommends that they "keep their distance" from this group of rebels. He declares that he is willing to run a test to see which of the sides is right: "With this you shall know that the Lord sent me to do all these deeds, for I did not devise them myself. If these men die as all men die, and the fate of all men will be visited upon them, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they descend alive into the grave, you will know that these men have provoked the Lord" (Bamidbar 16, 28-30).

And indeed, the test that Moses suggests is carried out, as the Torah tells us: "As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the earth beneath them split open. The earth beneath them opened its mouth and swallowed them... and they were lost to the assembly" (Bamidbar 16, 31-33).

As such, it is clear that disputes are negative and destructive; it is not a coincidence that the earth swallowed those involved in the argument. But the wise sages of the Jewish nation concluded from this affair that, although there are negative arguments, there is also such a thing as a positive or constructive dispute. They wrote: "Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure; one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not destined to endure. Which is a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The dispute(s) between Hillel and Shammai. Which is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company" (Mishna, Masechet Avot, 5).

Hillel and Shammai, or their famous students known as the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, represented two different schools of thought on all aspects of life; they had many disputes.

But despite this, they became the model for "a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven."

In contrast, Korach and his company became the model for "a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven." What is the real difference between the disputes of Hillel and Shammai versus that of Korach and his company? There are several aspects of disputes. On the one hand, disputes clarify issues that need it, bringing out the best in people's strengths and advancing humanity. And in general, nothing like disputes can solidify opinions in different areas. But on the other hand, disputes bring about harm to the other, as well as animosity and even hatred. How, then, can disputes be utilized for their constructive attributes, without allowing the destructive ones to influence us? Our sages revealed the answer to this in the definition they provided for each of the models of dispute.

A dispute that is "for the sake of Heaven," meaning its intentions are devoid of personal animosity and it is intended to really clarify the stands of both sides -- this is a constructive dispute that benefits both sides. Such were the arguments between Hillel and Shammai. Other than the areas about which they argued, they maintained an excellent personal relationship.

But a dispute that is "not for the sake of Heaven," meaning it is motivated by jealousy, competitiveness and social standing, is negative and destructive, with the power to destroy society and lead to its regression. Such was the dispute between Korach and Moses.

This dispute was etched in our national memory as the model of the destructive powers of disputes, which should be avoided at any price.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Korach: Endless Blessing

Korach, with his motto, "All the people in the community are holy" (Num. 16:3), contested the idea of a select group dedicated to serving God. After the rebellion was put down - quite literally, as it turned out - God affirmed the nation's need for Levites and kohanim to serve in the Temple and instruct the people.

Twenty-Four Matnot Kehunah

Since the tribe of Levi was dedicated to fostering the spiritual aspirations of the Jewish people, they were not meant to spend their days working the land. Instead, they were supported through a system of terumot and ma'aserot (tithes). For this reason, the story of Korach's rebellion is followed by a detailed description of the twenty-four matnot kehunah, gifts bestowed to the kohanim.

Not all people, however, are equally enthusiastic about giving these gifts. Our eagerness to perform a mitzvah depends on how well we comprehend its goal and purpose. If the objective of a mitzvah is not clearly understood, then its fulfillment will suffer from a lethargic, lackadaisical attitude.

The institution of kehunah, the priesthood, and the various methods of supporting it, will be better appreciated when the entire nation is on a high spiritual level. Only then will we truly recognize the benefit of their influence. And we will realize that our lives are blessed to the extent that we are connected to the spiritual life of the nation.

We may discern three attitudes toward matnot kehunah:

1. Refusal to Tithe

The lowest level is one of outright refusal to support the kohanim. This attitude stems from a spiritual crisis in which one fails to appreciate the benefit of a spiritual life in general, and the positive influence of the kohanim, knowledgeable in God's Torah, in particular. Such a person lacks a connection to the special covenant of the kehunah and its overall goal, which encompasses all generations of the Jewish people, past, present, and future. This is a terrible tragedy, the result of a profound emptiness and estrangement from Torah.

2. Fulfilling the Letter of the Law

The second attitude is one of disinterest, even neglect. At this level, appreciation for the institution of kehunah is limited to its future place in the lofty state promised to the Jewish people. Since we have not yet merited this long-awaited state, the resulting attitude is to observe the bare minimum, fulfilling only the letter of the law so as not to violate any legal obligations. Such an individual will seek loopholes to avoid tithing, like bringing produce into the house via the roof or the courtyard (see Berachot 35b).

While this outlook is not so callous that it reflects a life tragically distant from Torah, it is still very far from a life of blessing. These individuals have not clarified for themselves the purpose of life. They do not appreciate the true value of eternal goals. They fail to grasp how these goals transcend any particular time, how they form a collective activity composed of the combined service of many generations - beautiful structures built through continuous efforts of Torah and mitzvot over time. Sadly, with such an attitude, life appears as something that must be accepted against our will. Life's greatness and vitality, its essential holiness and beauty, are hidden. As long as one's outlook is so limited, life offers little satisfaction, and the soul will not be content with any of its accomplishments. What good is material success, when life's inner content is empty, incapable of nourishing our higher feelings and thoughts?

3. The Broad Outlook

The highest level is when one acquires the broader outlook that encompasses the overall expanse of life, embracing all generations and all

times. From this viewpoint, the current state of the institution of kehunah is not the decisive factor. The kehunah is respected and cherished due to its future greatness, and from the overall good that comes from the accumulation of all of its contributions in the past, present, and future.

With such an outlook, the nation is ready to receive a profusion of blessings, both spiritual and material. It is with regard to this approach toward tithing that it is written:

"Bring all the tithes to the storehouse, so that there is food in My house. Test Me in this, says the Lord of hosts: if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven, and pour out to you blessing "ad bli dai" - until there is more than enough." (Malachi 3:10)

The blessing is extraordinary, encompassing all of life's material aspects. But its source is the collective blessing that revitalizes life's inner depths: the blessing of inner peace, enabling us to feel the goodness of life itself. Life is not limited to the flawed present. As a result, nothing is lacking, and we receive unlimited blessings - "ad bli dai." As the Sages interpreted homiletically: "Until one's lips are exhausted from protesting: 'Enough!'" (Shabbat 32b)

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, pp. 183-184)
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More on *Birchas HaGomeil*

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Torah tells us, in *parshas Korach*, that Moshe spoke to the people, begging them to separate themselves from Korach's people and not even to touch any of their property. The people listened and were thereby saved from the calamity that met Korach, Dasan, and Aviram. Did they now have a responsibility to recite *birchas hagomeil*?

Question #1: Survival

"Was *birchas hagomeil* instituted only for the four specific dangers mentioned in *Tehillim*? If someone survived a different type of danger, such as an accident or armed robbery, does he recite *birchas hagomeil*?"

Question #2: Acknowledging at night

"May one *bensch gomeil* at night?"

Question #3: What about the Chashmonayim?

"Did the *Chashmonayim* recite *birchas hagomeil* upon winning their war?"

Question #4: Time limits

"Is there a time limit within which one must recite *birchas hagomeil*?"

Answer:

In three other articles, I discussed many of the laws of *birchas hagomeil*, but did not complete the topic. (If you look at the website RabbiKaganoff.com under the search word *birchas hagomeil* all three articles should come up, in addition to a fourth article about *Mizmor Lesodah*.) This article will discuss some curious additional aspects that, as yet, have not been discussed.

Only these four?

Was *birchas hagomeil* instituted only for those who survived four specific dangers, (those traveling through the desert, captives, the ill, and seafarers) mentioned in *Tehillim* (Chapter 107)? If someone survived a different type of danger, such as an accident or an armed robbery, does he recite *birchas hagomeil*?

We find a dispute among *rishonim* regarding this question. The *Orchos Chayim* quotes an opinion that one should *bensch gomeil*

after going beneath a leaning wall or over a dangerous bridge, but he disagrees, contending that one recites *birchas hagomeil* only after surviving one of the four calamitous situations mentioned in the *Gemara*. On the other hand, others conclude that one should recite *birchas hagomeil* after surviving any dangerous situation (*Shu't Rivash* # 337). The *Rivash* contends that the four circumstances mentioned by *Tehillim* and the *Gemara* are examples of instances in which it is common to be exposed to life-threatening danger and, therefore, they automatically generate a requirement to recite *birchas hagomeil*. It is also true that someone who survived an attack by a wild ox or bandits should recite *birchas hagomeil*, although it is not one of the four cases. Furthermore, the *Rivash* notes, since *Chazal* instituted that the person who was saved and his children and grandchildren recite a *brocha* when seeing the place where the miracle occurred, certainly one should recite a *brocha* of thanks over the salvation itself!

The *Shulchan Aruch* quotes both sides of the dispute, but implies that one should follow the *Rivash*. This is also the conclusion of the *Taz* and most later authorities (*Mishnah Berurah*; *Aruch Hashulchan*). Therefore, contemporary custom is to recite *birchas hagomeil* after surviving any potentially life-threatening situation.

It is noteworthy that a different *rishon* presents a diametrically opposed position from that of the *Rivash*, contending that even one who traveled by sea or desert does **not** recite *birchas hagomeil*, unless he experienced a miracle (*Rabbeinu Manoach*, *Hilchos Tefillah* 10:8, quoting *Raavad*). In *halachic* conclusion, the *Biur Halacha* writes that one recites *birchas hagomeil*, even if there was no difficulty on the sea voyage or the desert journey.

Time limits

Is there a time limit within which one must recite *birchas hagomeil*? Indeed, there is a dispute among early authorities as to whether one must recite *birchas hagomeil* within a certain number of days after surviving the calamity. The *Beis Yosef* (*Orach Chayim* 219) quotes a dispute among *rishonim*: the *Rambam* holds that one should recite *birchas hagomeil* within three days, whereas the *Rashba* provides a period of five days. However, the *Tur* implies that there is no time limit to the recitation of the *brocha*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (219:6) concludes that one should preferably not wait more than three days to recite *birchas hagomeil*, but if one did wait longer, one may still recite it, and there is no limit. Based on this conclusion, the *Magen Avraham* (219:6) says that one who was released from captivity after *kriyas haTorah* on Monday should not wait until Thursday, which is the next *kriyas haTorah*, to recite *birchas hagomeil*, since this is already the fourth day from when he was saved; instead, he should *bensch gomeil* earlier, even though this means that he will do so without *kriyas haTorah*. The *Mishnah Berurah* permits *bensching gomeil* even after thirty days, although he prefers that one delay no longer than three days.

What about at night?

May one *bensch gomeil* at night? If *bensching gomeil* is a replacement for the *korban todah*, and all *korbanos* in the *Beis Hamikdash* could be offered only during the day, may we recite the *birchas hagomeil* at night? This question is addressed by the *Chasam Sofer* in an interesting responsum (*Shu't Chasam Sofer*, *Orach Chayim* #51). The *Chasam Sofer's* case concerned the *Chacham Shabtei Elchanan*, who was the *rav* of the community of Trieste. This city is currently in northeastern Italy, but, at the time of the *Chasam Sofer*, it was part of the Austrian Empire, which also

ruled the *Chasam Sofer's* city of Pressburg. (Today, Pressburg is called Bratislava and is the capital of Slovakia.)

Rav Elchanan had returned from a sea voyage, and his community greeted him with a joyous celebration on the evening of his return. At this gathering, *Rav Elchanan* recited the *birchas hagomeil* in front of the large congregation.

One well-known local scholar, *Rav Yitzchak Goiten*, took issue with *Rav Elchanan's* reciting the *birchas hagomeil* at night, contending that since the *birchas hagomeil* is a substitute for the *korban todah*, it cannot be recited at night, as *korbanos* cannot be offered at night. Furthermore, he was upset that *Rav Elchanan* had not followed the accepted practice of reciting *birchas hagomeil* at *kriyas haTorah*.

This question was then addressed to the *Chasam Sofer*: which of the eminent scholars of Trieste was correct?

The *Chasam Sofer* explained that although *birchas hagomeil* substitutes for the *korban todah*, this does not mean that it shares all the laws of the *korban*. The idea is that since we cannot offer a *korban todah* today, our best option is to substitute the public recital of *birchas hagomeil*.

The *Chasam Sofer* noted that the gathering of the people to celebrate their *rav's* safe return was indeed the appropriate time to recite *birchas hagomeil*. In this situation, the *Chasam Sofer* would have recited *birchas hagomeil* in front of the assembled community, but he would have explained why he did so, so that people would continue to recite *birchas hagomeil* at *kriyas haTorah*, as is the *minhag klal Yisroel*.

Stand up and thank

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Tefillah*, 10:8) requires that a person stand up when he recites *birchas hagomeil*. The *Kesef Mishneh*, the commentary on the *Rambam* written by *Rav Yosef Karo* (the author of the *Beis Yosef* and the *Shulchan Aruch*) notes that he is unaware of any source that requires one to stand when reciting this *brocha*, and he therefore omits this *halacha* in *Shulchan Aruch*.

The *Bach* disagrees, feeling that there is an allusion to this practice in *Tehillim* 107, the chapter that includes the sources for this *brocha*, but other commentators dispute this allusion (*Elyah Rabbah* 219:3). The *Elyah Rabbah* then presents a different reason why one should stand, explaining that *birchas hagomeil* is a form of *Hallel*, which must be recited standing.

Still other authorities present other reasons for the *Rambam's* ruling. The *Chasam Sofer* explains that one must stand because of *kavod hatzibur*, the respect due an assembled community of at least ten people. Yet another approach is that since *birchas hagomeil* replaces the *korban todah*, it is similar to *shmoneh esrei*, which is said standing and which is similarly *bimkom korban* (*Brachos* 26b); therefore, *birchas hagomeil* should also be recited while standing (*Nahar Shalom* 219:1).

The *Rama* does not mention any requirement that *birchas hagomeil* be recited while standing, implying that he agrees with the *Shulchan Aruch's* decision, although the *Bach* and other later authorities require one to stand when reciting the *brocha*. The later authorities conclude that one should recite the *brocha* while standing, but that, *bedei'evid*, after the fact, one who recited the *brocha* while sitting has fulfilled his obligation and should not repeat the *brocha* (*Mishnah Berurah* 219:4).

Conclusion

Did *Yitzchak Avinu* recite *birchas hagomeil* after the *akeidah*? Did Chananyah, Mesha'el, and Azaryah recite *birchas hagomeil* upon exiting the furnace, or Daniel after waving good-bye to the lions? Did the *kohen gadol* recite *birchas hagomeil* upon exiting the *kodesh hakodoshim* on *Yom Kippur*? Did Rabbi Akiva recite *birchas hagomeil* over the fact that he was the only one who had studied the deepest secrets of the Torah (called "*pardes*") who remained physically and spiritually intact?

The *Chida*, in his *Machazik Brocha* commentary to *Shulchan Aruch* (219:1-3), presents a lengthy correspondence on this question that was conducted between his father and another *talmid chacham*, Rav Eliezer Nachum. Rav Yitzchak Zerachyah Azulai, the *Chida*'s father, contended that only someone who was placed in a situation involuntarily, including one who traveled by sea or through the desert because circumstances compelled him to endanger himself, recites *birchas hagomeil*, but not someone who chose to give up his life to fulfill the mitzvah of *Kiddush Hashem*.

Even when someone in the latter situation is saved by an obvious miracle, he should not recite *birchas hagomeil* since, had he lost his life, he would immediately have been elevated above all that this world could possibly offer. Similarly, he rules that the *kohen gadol* does not recite *birchas hagomeil* upon leaving the *kodesh hakodoshim*, since his entering was to fulfill a mitzvah of *Hashem*. Furthermore, he adds that a *kohen gadol* worthy of his position was never in any danger to begin with – only an unworthy *kohen gadol* needed to be concerned with the dangers of entering the *kodesh hakodoshim* on *Yom Kippur*.

On the other hand, Rav Elazar Nachum read Rav Azulai's responsum on the subject and strongly disagreed. Rav Nachum notes several *midrashic* and *Talmudic* passages that mention the tremendous songs of praise that were sung by the angels and by great *tzadikim* upon surviving great travails. He concludes that upon surviving these dangers one is required to recite *birchas hagomeil* to thank *Hashem* for the salvation.

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