

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Korach

"Fake News" Is Not a Modern-Day Invention

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1342 – The Case of The Man Who Now Deines That He's a Kohain Good Shabbos!

Over the years, we have spoken about certain Gemaras very many times, always trying to find new insights. Ohn ben Peles of Shevet Reuven is initially enumerated as one of the main protagonists of the Korach rebellion. Later on, he is not mentioned. A famous Gemara (Sanhedrin 109b) says that his wife saved him.

How did she save him? She argued to him that it does not make any difference to him whether Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader. Either way, he is just a follower, with no power of his own. "You have nothing to gain from this dispute. You will always remain just an Indian and not a Chief." Ohn ben Peles conceded that his wife was right, but said that at that point he had no choice in the matter. He had already agreed to join the rebellion. Korach and his followers were on their way to pick him up to join the fight with Moshe.

The Gemara relates that Ohn's wife came up with a great plan: She got her husband drunk. He was sleeping. She sat herself in the front of the tent, removed her hair covering, messed up her hair, and basically "scared away" the "very frum" rabble-rousers who came to pick up her husband. They did not want to look at a woman whose hair was uncovered! They just left the tent, and that is how Ohn ben Peles was saved. About this incident, the Gemara cites the pasuk, "The wisdom of women saved the house..." (Mishlei 14:1).

The ba'alei mussar ask the following question:

Korach had a whole litany of complaints against Moshe Rabbeinu: Moshe practices nepotism. He gave his close family members all the important jobs. Look at the embarrassment he causes to the Leviim – he shaved them, leaving them bald from head to toe. Then he picked them up and shook them like a lulav. Then, Korach related, there was this poor widow with two daughters. Moshe forced her to leave leket, shikcha, and peah (gifts to the poor) from her crops, reducing her harvest yield. Then he made her give terumos and ma'asros (additional gifts to the Kohanim and Leviim from the harvested crops). The Kohanim took her first born animals. Then they took the zeroa, lechayayim, and keivah (the parts of slaughtered animals that are given to the Kohanim). After leaving her penniless, she and her two daughters died in famine.

Ohn ben Peles must have bought into this litany of complaints. He was one of the chief antagonists. So, the ba'alei mussar ask, how was his wife able to convince him to abandon his rebellion? Granted, he would never become the leader of the people. But how does that answer all the complaints against Moshe Rabbeinu? How does that answer the fact that Moshe practiced nepotism? That he embarrassed the Leviim? That he caused the poor woman and her daughters to die?

The answer is that the list of ostensible complaints is never the real issue. When people get into a machlokes, it is not about the laundry list of "It's not right! / It's not fair!" issues that the antagonists come up with. People get into machlokes for one reason – because of personalities! They get into arguments because they want money or they want kavod (honor) or they want power. That is always the fuel that feeds machlokes.

When Ohn's wife explained to him that he was not going to get any money or honor or power out of his participation in the Korach-Moshe contest, all the arguments and taynas against Moshe Rabbeinu became irrelevant. Who cares whether a garment that is entirely techeiles is obligated in tzitzis or whether a house filled with sefarim is obligated in mezuzah or not? Those are academic discussions. What about the poor woman and her daughters? That story never happened. There was no planting in the midbar. There was no leket, shikcha, or peah. There was no zeroa, lechayayim, or keivah. It was all 'fake news.' Fake news did not start with Donald Trump. It went back to Korach. They made it up.

There was no such thing. It all became irrelevant once Ohn ben Peles realized that there was nothing for him in joining the machlokes.

That is what the Gemara means when it cites the pasuk, "The wisdom of women saved the house." The great wisdom of the wife of Ohn ben Peles was that she could tap into that crucial point of showing her husband that he had nothing to gain from joining the rebellion. She didn't get into a polemic with him to convince him about a garment that was entirely techeiles. She said, "I know what this about – this is about kavod." So she told her husband: Listen here, you will not get an iota more of kavod, whether Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader. That was her chochma – to see the real reason behind the machlokes. That is the case with every machlokes, ninety percent or more of the time. No matter how it starts out (perhaps for the noblest of reasons), in the end, it devolves into an argument over kavod and power. One of the greatest forces in human nature is the urge to win.

Forget all the high-sounding arguments, "Kavod haTorah! Kavod Shem Shamayim!" In the end, the major motivation is "I need to win." In the end, it is "all about me." That was the wisdom of the wife of Ohn ben Peles.

The Real 'Anav' Is Not Haunted by 'What People Are Going to Say'

The pasuk says that Korach and his followers gathered around Moshe and proclaimed: "It is too much for you! Because the entire assembly – all of them – are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3). The Rebbe Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshische asks a powerful question: If I were to say, "Albert Einstein was a smart fellow, but he knew nothing about physics," that would be the stupidest thing that anyone could say. He was the greatest physicist of the twentieth century. He may not have known how to balance a checkbook but he sure knew physics. If I were to say "Warren Buffet is a bright guy, but he can't pick a stock to save his life" that too would be idiotic. Warren Buffet is the best stock picker in the world. Don't tell me he can't pick a stock!

So, what are they complaining about Moshe Rabbeinu? "Moshe Rabbeinu is a ba'al gayvah (haughty person)." If you want to say things about Moshe Rabbeinu, fine. But don't accuse him of haughtiness: "The man was very humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth." (Bamidbar 12:3). It was his most outstanding character trait. So how can anyone claim that Moshe Rabbeinu was a ba'al gayvah? What is the meaning of this?

The Sefas Emes says something very interesting: There are two types of humble people. There is a fellow who is an anav, who knows he is highly talented. He knows he is smarter and more talented than most people. He knows who he is, except that he makes a conscious effort to act with humility because he knows that it is not good to be a ba'al gayvah. He works on himself so that he acts like an anav and never acts in a haughty fashion. This person is definitely an anav because even though he feels inside that he is better than other people, outwardly he behaves like an anav. He is very careful to never, in any way, shape, or form, act in a way that can be misinterpreted by people, causing them to think that he is a ba'al gayvah.

However, there is another type of anav – the type of anav that Moshe Rabbeinu was. Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest anav on the face of the earth because he had the greatest relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. Any person who has that kind of relationship with the Ribono shel Olam truly feels that he is, in fact, nothing. It is not an act. That is, in essence, how he feels.

Such a person never needs to worry about "what are other people going to say." That does not motivate him. I act the way I act because I really feel like this! Since Moshe was this type of "essential anav," sometimes he did things that could be interpreted by people as being haughty. Moshe Rabbeinu had no problem talking with authority and absolute certainty because he was not worried that people would thereby view him as arrogant. When he had to assert himself, he asserted himself without worrying "what are people going to say?" If he had to give people mussar, he gave people mussar. He was genuine to the core.

That, says the Sefas Emes, is why people could say, “Moshe Rabbeinu is a ba'al gayvah.” Sometimes he would act in a fashion that typical talented people would not act – just because they don't want to be considered a ba'al gayvah.

I would like to briefly share the following incident. It was apparently a cause célèbre that I did not know about. There was a fellow named Rav Moshe, son of Rav Pinchas m'Koretz. He had two sons who were in the printing business, in the city of Slavuta (Ukraine). They printed a Shas. Before printing the Shas, they wanted to make sure that their investment would be protected, so they went to all the Gedolim of Europe and got an agreement from them that for the next ten years, no one else would print a Shas. They figured that in ten years, they would be able to sell out their entire inventory of printed Shasim and could make a profit on their up-front expenses.

After five years, they sold out most of the Shasim. So, a fellow from Vilna – whose last name was Romm – said, “I want to print a Shas in Vilna”. This was the “Vilna Shas.” He went to the other printers and told them what he intended to do. They told him, “Wait a minute. We have an agreement from all the gedolim in Europe (including Rabbi Akiva Eiger) that no one is permitted to print a Shas for ten years, and it has only been five years.” Mr. Romm told the original printers that they had already sold most of their Shasim, and that he was willing to buy up every single remaining copy that had not yet been sold.

The case went to a Din Torah: Was Mr. Romm permitted to print the Vilna Shas after five years, with the condition that he would buy up all the remaining sefarim from the original printers? Rabbi Akiva Eiger paskened that he was permitted to print the new Shas. However, the original printers were not going to take this sitting down. They went to other Rabbonim, who sided with them and ruled that Mr. Romm could not print his Shas for another five years.

These original printers started the following rumor: People should not rely on the “heter” of Rabbi Akiva Eiger to print the Vilna Shas because he is already elderly, and everything he says is really based on the will of his son, Rav Shlomo Eiger. Rabbi Eiger senior doesn't make his own decisions anymore. Therefore, you can discount what Rabbi Akiva Eiger says. He is not the same Rabbi Akiva Eiger as he was five years ago.

Without getting into the details, Rabbi Akiva Eiger was an extraordinarily humble person. The story is told that when he and Rav Yakov m'Leesa (the “Nesivos”) were going to a certain town, there was a large reception at the train station of people who gathered to greet the two gedolei hador. Rabbi Akiva Eiger was sure that everyone was coming for the Nesivos and the Nesivos was sure that everyone was coming for Rabbi Akiva Eiger. That is the type of anav he was.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote on 4 Teves 5596 (December 25, 1835) “I am appalled by the chutzpah of these people and their words are blasphemous. Not only what they wrote about my son, the gaon Rav Shlomo Eiger, that he twists my heart, but also what they said about me, that I could be influenced to pasken against the din! All their correspondence to me (arguing on behalf of prohibiting the printing of the Vilna Shas) are devorim b'tailim (words that are null and void). I do not forgive them, for it is impossible to forgive shaming the Torah.”

So, we see this great anav, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, could write such a letter with such force and such self-righteous conviction! I am sure there were people reading this letter who said “Rabbi Akiva Eiger must be a ba'al gayvah!” The answer is that Rabbi Akiva Eiger was the same type of anav as Moshe Rabbeinu – a real genuine anav. He was an anav b'etzem (humble to his essence). That type of humble individual is not afraid to shout “Hey! This is a chutzpah! This is a bizayon haTorah!” Let people say that Rabbi Akiva Eiger is a ba'al gayvah, because he knows that he is not a ba'al gayvah.

That is how people could come to the erroneous conclusion that Moshe Rabbeinu – the humblest man who ever walked the earth – was “exalting himself” over the Khal Hashem. When you are a real anav, you act and you do what is right and you are not haunted by “What are people going to say?”

Parshat Korach: Holiness Must Be Achieved

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“The entire congregation is holy.” (Numbers 16:3)

Korach stages a rebellion against Moses; hence he is the adversary and antithesis to Moses, pictured by the subsequent sages and commentaries as the personification of a unique evil in the world. But unlike the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Korach stands tall not only with two legs, but with a powerful and convincing argument as well: a position which echoes throughout history.

Korach says to Moses and Aaron, “You have gone too far. The entire congregation is holy, and has God in their midst. Why are you setting yourselves above God's congregation?” (Numbers 16:3). After all, on the surface his argument appears to be both logical and just.

Indeed, did not Moses himself command the nation, “You shall become holy” (Leviticus 19:2)? And the Korach Defense Committee would maintain that if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity; affirmative action must become the order of the day. The era of the old guard rule (Moses' family) must come to an end; Korach's family must be given its chance to express its inherent holiness!

True, God revealed Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, and spoke directly only to him; but perhaps, if Korach had been raised in the palace of the pharaohs, and if he had had the opportunity as a free man of princely background to slay the Egyptian task-masters, undoubtedly God would be speaking to him as well. After all, we are all holy! It's just that some have received more special opportunities than others!

On the surface, Korach's words contain a glib truth. In reality, however, Korach and Moses represent two different ways of looking at the world, two different philosophies of life. When Moses brought down the Torah on Sinai, God did not declare everyone to be holy; after all, He created a world in which Cain had killed Abel and Pharaoh had enslaved an entire nation. What God did do was to place into the world the possibility of achieving holiness. “You shall become holy,” he commanded – in future tense, in potential, and only by means of arduous commitment to a lifestyle of 613 commandments.

“All families of the earth shall be blessed by you” – but only if you live by My word and become a light unto the nations! “The formation of the heart of humanity is evil from its inception” – but since humanity is also created in the image of God, the evil can be overcome and holiness can reign supreme. However, this depends on how you live and how you act. “I have set before you this day life and death, good and evil. Choose life.” Your deeds become the cardinal factor determining whether or not you've achieved holiness; meritocracy, not affirmative action, rules the day!

Now when Korach argued that everyone was holy, that he too could have achieved what Moses achieved had he only had the proper opportunity, was he defending holiness or uprooting holiness? After all, if everyone and everything is holy, then the word “holy” loses its meaning. By arguing for holiness in the way that he did – holiness now – Korach was really arguing against holiness. We need not work for it, or strive to achieve it. We already are!

And perhaps this is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses on the commandments of tzitzit (ritual fringes) and mezuzah, the two commandments dealing with the most basic human needs and expressions: clothing and shelter. Does a garment which is wholly tekhelet still require a thread of tekhelet in its ritual fringes? Does a house filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah (which has only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moses replied in the affirmative, Korach laughed at the lack of logic in Moses' teaching!

But Korach missed the point. Moses was teaching that the human being must constantly strive to improve, to become more holy than he was before; humans must never dare rest on their laurels, because evil is always lying in wait to ensnare, even at the mouth of the grave. Hence even a house filled with Torah scrolls still requires a mezuzah at the front door, and even a garment which is wholly tekhelet still requires ritual

fringes. Never be complacent, always remain on guard and strive to add another dose of sanctity.

The twentieth century had more than its share of “we are holy” philosophies, letting it all hang out, sanctifying every instinct and thought. It doesn’t matter if it was Norman O. Brown or Herbert Marcuse of the Living Theater, the rage in the Western world has been to free the id from the prison of the superego, and if the id is holy, then everything must be holy. But behind such views of an “anything-goes” holiness, nothing goes. If everything is special, nothing is special.

Fundamentally, Korach was saying that “as is” is holy – because nothing can change, grow, or develop. And that is the meaning of Korach’s name. The Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean bald – and no hair grows on a bald head – or ice, and no vegetation developed during the Ice Age. “As is his name, so is he.” Korach rejected the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he was cynically scornful of one’s ability to grow and develop and change and inspire.

But Moses’ (and God’s) approach is different. When Moses announced to the rebels the means by which God would determine who was holy to Him, he had Korach and his men bring fire in the fire pans and offer incense. Fire symbolizes the possibility of change, but only after a specific process takes place: by means of heat, the hardest materials can be made to bend and melt, can be transformed from solid to liquid and to many states in between. Incense changes the environment; its sweet-smelling fragrance can remove the rancid odor of death and decay, can transform the slaughtered carcasses of the animal sacrifices into an experience of commitment to God which can perfect – and perfume – the world. Moses’ vision was one of optimistic faith, the rising flames which bring out the fragrance of the incense and soar heavenward to the divine. Material objects, humanity, the very world can be changed, elevated, sanctified – but it depends on merit, on commitment, on achievement!

Korach’s punishment and death fit his crime and philosophy. Korach and his cohorts were swallowed alive by the earth. From the perspective of the earth and the grave, all who enter its bowels are equal. The earth makes no distinctions, remains oblivious to titles or accomplishments. The earth is the ultimate “equal-opportunity employer.” After one is buried underground, there is no longer any possibility of change or growth.

The parsha’s final proof that Aaron was the one chosen by God – and the symbolism which serves as the crowning proof of our thesis – involves the command to write the names of each of the tribes’ leaders on twelve staffs, to be placed in the Tent of Communion before the Ark of Testimony. The next day Aaron’s staff, representing the house of Levi, had blossomed, giving forth leaves and almonds, as if it were a tree. And a tree is the most basic symbol of that which grows and develops. After this, God said to Moses that no one should ever again deny the authority of Aaron’s priesthood.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks **The Leader as Servant** **Korach**

“You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?”

Num. 16:3

So said Korach to Moses. And Korach had a point. At the heart of his challenge is the idea of equality. That surely is a Jewish idea. Was not Thomas Jefferson at his most biblical when he wrote, in the Declaration of Independence, that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal?”

Of course, Korach does not mean what he says. He claims to be opposed to the very institution of leadership, and at the same time he wants to be the leader. “All are equal, but some are more equal than others” is the seventh command in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, his critique of Stalinist Russia. But what if Korach had meant it? If he had been sincere? There is, on the face of it, compelling logic to what he says. Did

God not call on Israel to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” meaning a kingdom each of whose members is a priest, a nation all of whose citizens are holy? Why then should there be a cadre of priests and one High Priest? Did not the military hero Gideon say, in the era of the Judges, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you” (Judges 8:23)? Why then should there be a single, life-appointed Moses-type leader rather than what happened in the days of the Judges, namely charismatic figures who led the people through a particular crisis and then went back to their previous anonymity, as Caleb and Pinchas did during the lifetime of Moses?

And to Gideon’s point, surely the people needed no other leader than God Himself. Samuel warns the people of the dangers of appointing a king:

“He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots ... He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves ... When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”

I Sam. 8:11-18

This is the biblical anticipation of Lord Acton’s famous remark that all power tends to corrupt. Why then give individuals the power Moses and Aaron in their different ways seemed to have?

The Midrash Tanhuma, quoted by Rashi, contains a brilliant commentary on Korach’s claim. It says that Korach gathered his co-conspirators and issued Moses a challenge in the form of a halachic question:

He dressed them with cloaks made entirely of blue wool. They came and stood before Moses and asked him, “Does a cloak made entirely of blue wool require fringes [tzitzit], or is it exempt?” He replied, “It does require [fringes].” They began laughing at him [saying], “Is it possible that a cloak of another [coloured] material, one string of blue wool exempts it [from the obligation of techelet], and this one, which is made entirely of blue wool, should not exempt itself?”

Tanhuma, Korach 4; Rashi to Num. 16:1

What makes this commentary brilliant is that it does two things. First it establishes a connection between the episode of Korach and the immediately preceding passage, the law of tzitzit at the end of last week’s Parsha. That is the superficial point. The deep one is that the Midrash deftly shows how Korach challenged the basis of Moses’ and Aaron’s leadership. The Israelites were “all holy; and God is among them.” They were like a robe, every thread of which is royal blue. And just as a blue robe does not need an additional fringe to make it bluer still, so a holy people does not need extra holy people like Moses and Aaron to make it holier still. The idea of a leadership hierarchy in “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” is a contradiction in terms. Everyone is like a priest. Everyone is holy. Everyone is equal in dignity before God. Hierarchy has no place in such a nation.

What then did Korach get wrong? The answer is contained in the second half of his challenge: “Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?” Korach’s mistake was to see leadership in terms of status. A leader is one higher than the rest: the alpha male, the top dog, the controller, director, dominator, the one before whom people prostrate themselves, the ruler, the commander, the superior, the one to whom others defer. That is what leaders are in hierarchical societies. That is what Korach implied by saying that Aaron and Moses were “setting themselves above” the people.

But that is not what leadership is in the Torah, and we have had many hints of it already. Of Moses it says:

“He was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”

Num. 12:3

Of Aaron and the priests, in their capacity as those who blessed the people, it says:

“So they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Num. 6:27

In other words, the priests were mere vehicles through which the Divine force flowed. Neither priest nor prophet had personal power or authority.

They were transmitters of a word not their own. The prophet spoke the Word of God for this time. The priest spoke the Word of God for all time. But neither was author of the Word. That is why humility was not an accident of their personalities but of the essence of their role.

Even the slightest hint that they were exercising their own authority, speaking their own word or doing their own deed, immediately invalidated them. That, in fact, is what sealed the fate of Nadav and Avihu, and of Moses and Aaron later, when the people complained and they said, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10)

There are many interpretations of what went wrong on that occasion but one, undeniably, is that they attributed the action to themselves rather than God (see Hizkuni ad loc.).

Even a king in Jewish law – the office that comes closest to status – is commanded to be humble. He is to carry a Torah scroll with him and 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" (See Deut. 17:19-20 and Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 2:6)

In Judaism leadership is not a matter of status but of function. A leader is not one who holds himself higher than those he or she leads. That, in Judaism, is a moral failing not a mark of stature. The absence of hierarchy does not mean the absence of leadership. An orchestra still needs a conductor. A play still needs a director. A team still needs a captain.

A leader need not be a better instrumentalist, actor, or player than those he leads. His role is different. He must co-ordinate, give structure and shape to the enterprise, make sure that everyone is following the same script, travelling in the same direction, acting as an ensemble rather than a group of prima donnas. He must have a vision and communicate it. At times he must impose discipline. Without leadership even the most glittering array of talents produces, not music but noise. That is not unknown in Jewish life, then and now.

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Judges 17:6, Judges 21:25

That is what happens when there is no leadership.

The Torah, and Tanach as a whole, has a marvellous, memorable way of putting this. Moses' highest honour is that he is called *eved Hashem*, "the servant of God." He is called this once on his death (Deut. 34:5), and no less than eighteen times in Tanach as a whole. The only other person given this title is Joshua, twice. In Judaism, a leader is a servant and to lead is to serve. Anything else is not leadership as Judaism understands it.

Note that we are all God's servants. The Torah says so:

"To Me the Israelites are servants; they are My servants whom I brought out of Egypt."

Lev. 25:55

So it is not that Moses was a different kind of being than we are all called on to be. It is that he epitomised it to the utmost degree. The less there is of 'self' in one who serves God, the more there is of God. Moses was the supreme exemplar of Rabbi Johanan's principle, that "Where you find humility, there you find greatness."

It is one of the sadder features of Judaism that we tend to forget that many of the great ideas appropriated by others are in fact ours. So it is with Servant Leadership, the phrase and theory associated with Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990). Greenleaf himself derived it from a novel by Hermann Hesse with Buddhist undertones, and in fact the Jewish concept is different from his. Greenleaf held that the leader is the servant of those he leads. In Judaism a leader is the servant of God, not of the people; but neither is he their master. Only God is that. Nor is he above them: he and they are equal. He is simply their teacher, guide, advocate and defender. His task is to remind them endlessly of their vocation and inspire them to be true to it.

In Judaism, leadership is not about popularity:

"If a scholar is loved by the people of his town, it is not because he is gifted but because he fails to rebuke them in matters of heaven."

Ketubot 105b

Nor is a true leader eager for the job. Almost without exception the great leaders of Tanach were reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership. Rabban Gamliel summed it up when he said to two Sages he wanted to appoint to office:

"Do you imagine I am offering you rulership? I am offering you *avdut*, the chance to serve."

Horayot 10a-b

That, then, was Korach's mistake. He thought leaders were those who set themselves above the congregation. He was right to say that this type of ruler has no place in Judaism. We are all called on to be God's servants. Leadership is not about status but function. Without *tzitzit*, a blue robe is just a robe, not a holy garment. Without leadership, the Jewish people is just a people, an ethnic group, not a holy nation. And without reminders that we are a holy nation, who then will we become, and why?

The lion has risen

Israel did not ask "whether" but "how." And with reliance on G-d's help, that question was answered by its brave fighters, with President Trump giving the final hammer blows. Reading parashat Shlach, we can see that this is what the spies did not do. [last week's] Rabbi YY Jacobson

It feels like the Jewish people are now repairing the great error and tragedy of the spies, explored in this week's Torah on Thursday, June 12, 2025, 16 Sivan, 5785, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He placed a prayer note in the Wall, on which he had scribbled a single line, a quote from the Torah: "Behold, a people rises like a lioness, and stands up like a lion."

Hours later, the world understood the significance of that verse. Israel launched a surprise attack on Iran, named Operation Rising Lion.

As Rabbi Aron Moss (Sydney, Australia) wrote eloquently, there couldn't be a more fitting name.

Our sages note that the lion's shape is unique: broad in the front, narrow at the back. "This symbolizes the Jewish people. Our strength is forward-facing. We lead, not follow. We don't look back, but look ahead to a better world, and do what we can to bring it about."

Israel launched a preemptive strike. Like a lion, we are on the front foot. Rather than wait to be attacked, Israel struck first, in keeping with the Talmudic rule: "When someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill them first."

History has taught us to take that rule seriously. When Israel hesitates or ignores clear threats, the consequences are devastating, like the Yom Kippur War and October 7. But when Israel acts decisively to prevent our enemies' plans, we see victory, like the Six-Day War, and the dazzling achievements we are seeing now.

Israel understood that the question is not if we will strike, only when and how. The threat of Iran was so real and lethal, that the Jewish nation grasped we must rise like lions and act.

If We Win?

It's an old anecdote. Years ago, the Israeli parliament, or Knesset, convened an emergency session to figure out a solution for the Israeli economy.

One brilliant minister said, "Let's declare war on the U.S., and then, in the wake of the utter destruction America will bring upon us, we will receive billions of dollars for reconstruction, like Germany and Japan."

"Sounds great," responded another member of the Knesset. "One problem: What will we do if we win the war?"

Twelve Jews on a Mission

This week's portion, Shlach, tells the story of 12 men who were dispatched by Moses from the desert to go and survey the Land of Canaan and its inhabitants. The purpose of their journey was to prepare the Jewish people for the subsequent conquest and settlement of the Land.[1]

Upon discharging the spies on their mission, Moses presented them with a list of questions they needed to answer. "See the Land," Moses said to them. "How is it? And the nations that dwell in it—are they strong or

weak? Are they few or numerous? And how is the land in which they dwell—is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they dwell—are they open or are they fortified?"

When the twelve spies returned from their 40-day tour of Israel they presented to the people a report of their findings.

"We arrived at the Land to which you sent us," the spies said, "and indeed it flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. But the people that dwell in the land are powerful, the cities are greatly fortified and we also saw the offspring of the giants. We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us," they proclaimed.

The report demoralized the Jewish nation and drained it of the motivation to enter the Land. As a result, the spies died, and much of the generation died in the desert, never making it into the Promised Land. Only 39 years later, in the year 1276 B.C.E., did the children and grandchildren of this generation cross the borders and settle in the Promised Land.

Kill the Messenger?

One of the many questions raised by biblical commentators [2] concerns the reason for the spies being condemned to punishment. Moses gave them a detailed list of questions about the Land; he instructed them to make their own observations as to what will await the people upon their arrival.

This is exactly what the spies did. They came back with an answer to all of Moses' questions and reported what they perceived to be the reality. If Moses expected them to cover up their observations -- that the Land was inhabited by mighty men and its cities were greatly fortified -- he should have never sent them in the first place!

Why were the men faulted for relating what they had seen? Is this not a case of "kill the messenger?"

Introducing Paralysis

The answer is that if the spies had merely related to Moses and to the people the reality of the situation as they saw it, everything would have been fine. But they did more than that. They used the difficulties they observed as an excuse to capitulate in the face of fear.

Had the spies returned and said, "Hey guys, we have seen a mighty people and well-protected cities in the Land, so now we need to devise an effective strategy of how to go about our challenging mission," they would have fulfilled their task flawlessly. The moment they responded to the obstacles by saying "We cannot do it anymore," they swayed an entire people to abandon their G-d-given destiny.

The spies are condemned for substituting the legitimate and important question "How will we do it?" with the despairing and helpless conclusion, "We can never do it!"

Conquering Your Darkness

Each of us has a domain in our life that needs to be conquered, a terrain that needs to be transformed into a "holy land." Some of us need to confront fear, numbness, insecurity, temptation, guilt, self-loathing, or shame. We must confront challenges within our psyches, our marriages, and our families. Since the challenges that lay in recovery's path are at times frightening, we are naturally tempted to believe that we are incapable of overcoming our darkness and we surrender to the obstacles. The feeling is understandable, but if you surrender to it, it will rob you of the opportunity to liberate your life and arrive at your personal "Promised Land." The option of resignation compels you to remain stuck in a barren desert made up of the stuff of shame and despair.

The question ought not to be, "Can I do it?" Because that's the question coming from my inner sense of incompetence. G-d conceived you in love, and the day you were born is the day He declared that the world is incomplete without you.

As the saying goes, sometimes when you find yourself in a dark place you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted. The resources to repair the "hole in our personal roof" are present. I am empowered to leave my wilderness and discover my light, joy, and wholeness. G-d has sent me into each of my life's journeys with the power to bring light into my darkness and discover my own inner infinity, as a Divine ambassador of love, light, healing, and hope.

The story of the spies is our personal story. My trauma tells me, "I can't," and I have all the emotional evidence and data to support my conclusions. But with lots of empathy and faith in my inner Divine self, I can discover a deeper untarnished, unfearful core that has the power to say: I can, and I will; now let me figure out how.

I want to dance to the beat of creativity and connection, not despair to the beat of survival and loneliness.

"The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer," General Montgomery once remarked.

Ask not "whether," but rather "how." [3]

That is what Israel did now in Iran, and we are seeing extraordinary Divine miracles, despite the horrific losses. America has joined to destroy the nuclear threat Iran posed. May Israel not stop till full victory is achieved.

[1]Numbers chapters 13-14.

[2] Nachmanides in his commentary on the opening verses of the portion.

[3] This essay is based on an address I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Shlach, 21 Sivan, 5749 (June 24, 1989), published in Sefer Hasichos 5749 vol. 2. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 13 pp. 39-41. For other answers to the above question, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Shlach 1, and many references that are noted there.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Korach

Grinding the Point

The sojourn in the desert was no walk in the park. True, it was a period of time in which miracles were the norm and the level of spirituality soared, but life next to G-d required a perfect commitment. The actions of the Jewish nation were scrutinized, the eyes of Hashem peering as a strict teacher, correcting and adjusting every wrong move with immediate censure and swift action. We suffered for our mistakes. The Jews wandered for 40 years because of the erroneous reports of the spies. And the many rebellions and uprisings concerning the manna and other matters, including the ever-resounding desire to return to Egypt, were met with swift, decisive retribution.

This week, however, the rebels are rebuked in three totally different ways, each a miracle unto itself. Korach organized a rebellion against Moshe and Ahron. Claiming nepotistic inconsistency, Korach said that Ahron did not deserve the position of Kohen Gadol. After all, he claimed "the entire congregation is holy, (they were all at Sinai). "Why, then," he argued with Moshe, "do you raise yourselves higher than the rest of the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3)

But this time the punishment is not the ordinary plague. First, In a display of absolute power and sovereignty, Hashem opens the earth and swallows Korach and the immediate family of rabble-rousers whole and alive!

Then his 250 co-conspirators are consumed by fire as they attempt to offer a ktore (incense) sacrifice. And afterwards, to quell more grumbling, another miracle occurs. Each tribal leader is commanded to place a stick in the ground and miraculously only Ahron's stick begins to bud before their eyes. It grew leaves, flowers, and almonds — a heavenly sign that only Ahron merits the exalted position of Kohen Gadol.

It always bothered me. The opening of the earth is no little feat. Earthquakes of that magnitude did not occur at a moment's notice! Wasn't that event powerful enough to make the point? Why was there a need to quell the whining and punish the perpetrators with such powerful punishments and magnificent miracles? Shouldn't a heavenly warning have been enough?

Rabbi Meshulam Igra of Pressburg was one of Europe's leading scholars in the latter part of the 18th century. As a young man, he was engaged to the daughter of a prominent community leader in the city of Butzatz. A few months before the wedding the young chosson ate a meal at the home of his future father-in-law. Dessert was served together with a hot

treat a delicacy that the impoverished Reb Meshulam had never heard of — coffee.

The servant brought out a cup of brewed coffee together with sugar and milk. The prospective father-in-law directed his son in law to partake. The young scholar looked quizzically at each of the entities and began to ponder. There were two liquids and sugar. The Talmud teaches that eating precedes drinking. He took a spoon of sugar and ate it. Then he was unsure what to drink first the milk or the black brew. Noting that darkness in the Torah comes before day, he drank the black coffee. Noticing the grinds at the bottom of the cup, he took his spoon and began to eat them. Not wanting to embarrass his soon-to-be father-in-law who had served such a difficult-to-eat dessert, he slowly chewed and swallowed the grinds. His prospective bride stood in shock.

“Father,” she cried “I cannot marry a man who does not know how to drink a cup of coffee. He is a total klutz!” The engagement was broken.

Years later this same community leader visited the home of Rav Yeshaya Pick the prominent Rav of Breslow. Upon entering the study he noticed the rav engrossed in a letter. He looked totally concerned and distraught. When the man asked what problem was, Rabbi Pick told him that he just received a letter that is filled with the deepest insights. “I have to be totally immersed in Torah thought to begin to comprehend the level of this man’s brilliance. In fact,” he continued, “I do not think a man of this caliber has emerged in the last fifty years! And,” he added, “besides the brilliance, one can note his amazing humility and fine character throughout every word he writes.”

Then he looked up at the man. “You come from Butzatz. Have you ever hear of a man called Meshulam Igra?”

The man didn’t emit a verbal response. He fainted.

When he came to, he recounted the entire story of the engagement and its dissolution, how Rabbi Igra was meant to be his son-in-law but the match was broken over coffee grounds. Rabbi Pick looked up at him and shook his head sadly. “Is that so?” he exclaimed. “You gave up the opportunity for this great man because he did not know how to drink a cup of coffee?”

Then he looked at the man and simply declared, “Faint again!”

Perhaps the greatest undoing of our nation throughout its history is the non-appreciation of its great leaders. Among our midst exists diamonds, but they are often treated like raw coal. There is a most popular song, sung in the Yeshiva world on all holidays, ” Moshe emes v’Toraso emes. Moshe is true and his Torah is true.” The inseparability of the Torah and its teachers, the appreciation of the two as inseparable in their validity is a fundamental in throughout the writings of Maimonides and all the philosophies of Torah Judaism. Without recognizing the greatness of our leaders, we would be lost. Hashem did not the rebellion against Moshe to subside with just one action. It took three very different miracles, the splitting of the earth, the fire that consumed, and the budding of the dry sticks, to reiterate the most important point that sustains us until today. Because if we do not realize from where our strength comes, Hashem will remind us. And He will tell us to faint again!

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Korach

The Arrogance of it All

THE NAME ALONE makes me uncomfortable. It’s not just what Korach did, because there have been many rebellions against the Torah leadership throughout the ages. It is also about who he was and what he became.

A hot topic is the Erev Rav, the Mixed Multitude. They’re the fire-starters in the Chumash ever since Moshe Rabbeinu took them out of Egypt with the Jewish People. There’s not really much positive to say about them, and anyone since who has made life difficult for the Jewish nation has often been labeled with their name.

But the truth is, we’re pretty good at producing our own worst enemies. Last week’s parsha previewed that, and this week’s parsha is its follow-up. The Gemora says that one of the most arrogant groups of people are Jews who do not learn Torah. These parshios make it clear that not learning is not a prerequisite. We have been shown that a person can be a talmid chacham and still fit the bill, sometimes because of what they know.

The Gemora also explains that arrogant people on the scale of Korach and the spies don’t come out of nowhere. One of the main sources of their souls are the 974 Generations that existed (briefly) prior to Creation. The Leshem explains that these “beings” were not humans and they did not live in a world anything like ours. Contrary to what many have mistakenly thought, these 974 generations were not an earlier version of our Creation. They were just a spiritual mechanism to actualize the reality of evil so we could have free will in our world.

Does any of this really make a difference? Perhaps it does between God and the Korachs of history when it comes to passing judgment on their level of culpability. But down here, the damage is the damage no matter what the reason for it. If someone is injured because someone accidentally pulled a trigger, they bleed the same way. And “Just following orders” does not usually get a person off the moral hook.

Is it a coincidence then that his name was Korach, which is similar to the word kerach—ice? It was a testament to the kind of person he was, that he had a frigid personality, the kind that results when a person is arrogant. Like a person over-exposed to the cold, his spiritual circulation stopped and he spiritually gangrened, a lot like the left in this country and the leadership of Iran.

Iran is getting pummeled. And they will get even more pummeled in the days to come because their arrogance, which got them into this trouble in the first place, is so out of control. America has now joined the war. Logic dictates that Iran step down and lick their wounds. It also dictates that Hamas give back the remaining hostages and get out of the war as soon as they can. Arrogance dictates a do-or-die strategy.

Similarly, the left in this country is taking steps to get their way at great risk to the security of the country. Nothing to do with truth or falsehood, right or wrong...just use their power and position to get the man in their way out of it. Its leaders have been caught being hypocritical, but they don’t feel the need to defend themselves because it is not about being moral, only about being in power.

And last week’s parsha and this week’s as well remind us that this is not a new problem, but that it has been a thorn in God’s side, so-to-speak, for millennia now...on that He seems to have put there Himself...for our good...somehow. Yes, it makes bad worse, but it also makes good, better. As Chazal say, when Malchus Edom (Western society today) claims to be kosher when it is really treif, Moshiach will finally come. When the world turns upside down and right becomes wrong and vice versa, get your Shabbos best ready so it will be ready to greet him.

That’s why the final war, the GR”A said, is against the Erev Rav and is the worst of all. He says that you either fight against them or are on their side, even if you think you are neutral. It’s easy to fight a self-professed enemy who does nothing to hide it, like Hamas and Iran. It is far trickier to defend yourself against an enemy who claims to be on your side while stabbing you in the back. It just confuses too many people into thinking the wrong way and doing the wrong thing.

The spies got straightened out in the same parsha last week, as did Korach and his assembly. It was also perfectly clear who did it, even though many still challenged Moshe Rabbeinu after the earth closed its mouth once again. What arrogance won’t make people do!

I can’t speak for everyone, but I think most of us can agree that we have witnessed how we ourselves have stood up for things we have said or done already knowing that we were wrong. We should have admitted our mistakes and perhaps even apologized, but something inside of us just wouldn’t let us...hoping that somehow we could save face, all the while destroying more of it. I have personally been awed by just how far people will go to protect themselves, and at what cost. And from hereon in, it will be our ability to humble ourselves before the truth that may actually save our lives, and our portion in the World to Come. It’s war

alright, but it is also a test of character to see who we really are and what we really believe.

Good Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

Since Parshas Korach deals with avoiding machlokes, I am sharing questions and answers that deal with this topic...

Rabbi Kaganoff

Question:

My husband keeps shooting himself in the leg at every job he gets. He comes in late, leaves exactly on time no matter how hectic things are in the office, and generally seems lazy when it comes to his jobs. Then he's surprised when he's the first to get laid off. He was recently fired from yet another job. Is there any way I can motivate him to change, or point out what's going on, without destroying his fragile ego?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:

Anything you try to do to change your husband will just lead to more frustration and cause shalom bayis difficulties. He undoubtedly knows the problem, but a person will only change if and when he wants to. Your nudging him will not motivate him. You are probably doing a reasonable amount of nudging without even realizing it and we can assume it's taking its toll.

The one thing you can do is try to build your husband up with positive motivation and compliments. Help him feel better about himself. Find excuses to compliment him in a sincere way, specifically on the rare occasion when he shows initiative.

Although when he is unemployed one cannot compliment him for his bringing home income, I often find it surprising that women expect their husbands to compliment them for preparing supper, but a woman does not find it necessary to thank her husband for going to work. One cannot emphasize more how much it does for a man's ego to be complimented for earning a living and going to work, particularly when it is a struggle for him to do so.

Question:

I'm almost twenty-one years old but have not yet started dating since I have an older sister who is still in shidduchim. My parents want me to start dating already, but I don't want to. My sister also says I shouldn't wait for her, but I disagree. I can't picture myself as a kalla, getting married before her. I don't want that to happen! And once I start dating it may happen. What should I do?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:

I believe you should start dating. The bottom line is that, while it's wonderful to care for your sister's feelings, it is not easy for a girl to find a shidduch in today's world, and there's no need to make it any more difficult for yourself.

The harsh reality is that your sister is not yet married, but that's no reason to prevent you from getting married. This is particularly the case when no one else in your family seems to mind; in fact, they are encouraging you to date. It's misplaced to worry so much about your sister's feelings that you put your own future in jeopardy.

However, I must point out that if you are very resistant to the idea of dating, it may make the process quite difficult. If you find that you continue to struggle with feelings of ambivalence and guilt, it would be best to seek out a rebbetzin, therapist, or life coach who can help you work through these feelings.

May you and your sister both find your zivugim b'karov.

Question:

I work in a large marketing company where nearly all the employees are frum. The staff meets once a week to discuss ideas and proposals. Once a month, that meeting includes the CEO, and all ideas are finalized. Numerous times, my immediate supervisor has presented my ideas as her own. This is very detrimental to me because the possibility of a promotion is to a certain extent based on the proposal of original ideas. Her stealing my ideas is hampering my growth in the company. It's difficult for me to say anything to my supervisor because I will be risking her wrath, and she is the darling of the CEO precisely because he

thinks she is very creative. When I once broached the subject, she said I was imagining things and that the ideas were really hers. What can I do? R' Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:

The specific situation you are presenting is a bit unusual, because it is uncommon for a frum person who is psychologically healthy to say an outright lie to a listener who knows he is lying. Thus, there is either a major misunderstanding, something difficult to explain when this has happened repeatedly, or, more likely, one of the two parties suffers from a psychological handicap. Since we do not know which party is having this difficulty, it is hard for me to advise you.

Assuming, however, that you are indeed the party being wronged here, and you've repeatedly discerned this type of unhealthy behavior in your immediate superior, you have an obligation to report this to the "big boss." The reason here is simple: Halacha requires us to protect someone else's money, and having either an unstable or dishonest employee could cause your boss long-term financial harm.

You should make a discreet appointment with the big boss and explain only what you have observed, without any added interpretation or exaggeration. It is a good idea to review the relevant parts of Sefer Chofetz Chaim before the meeting and think through carefully exactly what you may say and how you will say it. Make it clear to the big boss that you are only meeting because of concern for his interests. Indeed, it is strictly prohibited to talk to him because you are angry at your immediate supervisor and want to get even.

Question:

My mother-in-law and I have an excellent, warm relationship. However, there is one area of conflict, which, although it doesn't damage the quality of our relationship, causes her anxiety and me irritation. The issue is chasunah attendance. My mother-in-law's father is one of many siblings, and they are currently marrying off their grandchildren. I see no need to kill my precious nights - work time (I work at home), housework, and much needed sleep - to attend a stranger's chasunah just because they are my mother-in-law's uncle's grandchild. To satisfy my mother-in-law's feelings, and to show that I'm not rebelling against her family's norms (as she claims I am), I go 2-3 times a year to a chasunah when it works out for me. When I do attend, I don't know most people there, and don't feel my presence appreciated enough for me to have killed a night. My mother-in-law feels that my attitude is wrong. She says if I would go to the chasunahs I would develop a relationship with her cousins and my second cousins, and they wouldn't be strangers. I feel that I don't have the emotional resources to have a relationship with so many people, to the extent that I'd attend their simchos. My mother-in-law agreed that I present this issue to you. Please advise.

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:

You seem to be asking whether you are obligated to acquiesce to your mother-in-law's request. In response, I'd like to start by briefly reviewing the halachos of kibud av va'em. You do have an obligation of kibud av v'em towards your husband's parents, although not on the same level as your obligation towards your own parents or your husband.

However, the mitzvah includes only two components - kibud and moreh. Kibud encompasses ensuring that your in-laws have their physical needs met. This involves providing them with food if needed, bringing them a drink if requested, taking care of their medical needs if relevant, and so on. Moreh requires you to show them respect by not contradicting them, not sitting in their set places, etc.

In the situation you describe, I don't see how either kibud or moreh comes into play. One can claim that since your mother-in-law is insisting so strongly on this, there's an element of moreh. However, that is only a result of her feeling so strongly that she insists on it, to the extent that your refusal is rude. Her position, even under these circumstances, is by no means obvious.

If you are like most frum women today, between caring for a large household, supplementing the family income, and taking care of all your other responsibilities, you are juggling the equivalent of two full-time jobs. It seems unfair for your mother-in-law to pile even more on your already overburdened shoulders. Women today are already far too

stressed, and need to spend more, not less, time with their families. Encroaching on that time for the sake of fairly distant relatives is not a wise move.

I don't know where you live. If you live in a city where it's acceptable to merely show up, say mazel tov, and leave, and if your mother-in-law would be happy with that arrangement, perhaps you could do that on occasion. But I wouldn't advocate any more than that.

Question:

I'm a sheitel macher, and recently opened up my own business. There's a problem I keep running into - relatives and good friends often assume that I will either do their sheitels entirely for free, or give them a steep discount. In addition, they often expect priority, and that I should do their sheitels before others that came earlier. I'm trying hard to establish myself, and my prices are already on the low end. Every discount impacts my parnassah. And when I push one job before another, it can hurt my reputation with the woman who now has to wait longer. I've tried to explain all this, but from the cool responses I've received, I realize that friends and relatives perceive me as mercenary and callous. What can I do?

R' Kaganoff:

As a rav, I'm going to approach this question from a halachic perspective, and leave the emotional issues involved to the other respondents.

It looks like your family members are unaware of the difficult predicament in which they are putting you. Their approach to utilizing your services is misguided. Just as we are told in hilchos tzedakah that relatives take precedence over someone not related, so, too, assuming that the quality of work is identical, we should bring our business to a relative before someone else. This is not for our personal benefit so that we can get a price break; it's so we can perform the highest level of tzedaka – that of helping someone become self-sufficient.

It seems like your friends and relatives are acting in self-interest, not halachic interest. They are probably not aware that their actions can sabotage your nascent business. You're trying to be responsible, build a client base, and earn a good reputation; giving their sheitels priority over those that came in earlier jeopardizes all that. In addition, as you may know, businesses that fail usually do so early. This is a critical period for you and cutting into your profits at this time is not wise.

I'm not saying that it's wrong to give a break to a friend or a relative – but that's a gesture you can only offer once you've established yourself and are on secure financial footing. Your primary responsibility is to your immediate family, and supporting them has to be your first objective. *Iy"H*, once you are well-established you can certainly offer your family and friends discounts, but it will be because you can afford to and wish to, not because you feel pressured to do so.

Until then, it may help to discuss the issue with your local rav. Assuming that he also feels that giving discounts is incorrect at this time, you can then tell your friends and relatives that you were given a psak not to give discounts until your business is established. This will hopefully deflect the negative feedback you've been receiving and will perhaps prompt your relatives and friends to examine their actions through the eye of halacha.

Question:

We are a young married couple with one child and living in Eretz Yisrael. Both of our parents live in the States but about a 3-4 hour drive apart. As Pesach approaches and we made our plans to visit the US, it became clear that only one set of parents was willing to pay towards our tickets to come home. After taking this into account, we decided that we still wanted to go and would pay the other half ourselves. However, when deciding where to be over Yom Tov we are expected to split it evenly, although we feel that we should only be going to the family that paid for us to come, or at least spend most of the time with them. Please help.

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff:

There are no obvious halachic guidelines for such an issue; it falls into the category of the "fifth Shulchan Aruch." I'm therefore offering you

my personal thoughts and judgment. One family is paying for half of your tickets; the other side is not contributing. It does seem fair that you should spend some more time with the side that is putting up money. However, there are mitigating factors that must be kept in mind:

Firstly, I'm assuming that the side that isn't paying is not doing so because they are stingy but rather because they simply don't have the resources. This brings up an important question: Should a family be penalized for not having the financial wherewithal that another family has been blessed with?

Secondly, if one side has more resources than the other side, it's probable that they come to visit in Eretz Yisrael on occasion, while the financially-strapped family probably comes rarely, if at all. This means that if you don't go visit them, you may never see them.

These factors indicate that you and your spouse need to sit down and have an open, honest conversation about the issue and reach a decision together. Although such discussions are not easy, realize that the making of a strong marriage comes through discussing sticky situations and working out issues.

Try to depersonalize the discussion and really focus on the points that the other person is making. Sometimes, it's helpful for each of you to "plead" the other side. Let the spouse whose parents are paying enumerate why the Yom Tov should be split, and let the one whose parents aren't able to chip in list the reasons the lion's share should be spent by the parents who are paying. Doing this will help you get out of your own headspace and see another perspective. Keep speaking until you reach a decision that you're both comfortable with. I wish you much hatzlacha.

Rav Kook Torah

Korach: Holiness in the Midst of the Community

Judaism has an unusual concept called a minyan — a prayer quorum. Special prayers sanctifying God's name, such as the Kedushah and Kaddish prayers, may only be recited in the presence of ten adult Jewish men. An individual may pray alone, but without a minyan, certain parts of the liturgy must be omitted.

Where does this requirement come from?

The Talmud derives it from God's declaration, "I will be sanctified in the midst of the Israelites" (Lev. 22:32). What exactly does the word 'midst' mean?

We find the word 'midst' used again when God warned the people living nearby the dissenters in Korach's rebellion: "Separate yourselves from the midst of this *eidah* (community)" (Num. 16:20). From here, the Sages concluded that God is sanctified within an *eidah*.

And what is the definition of *eidah*? The Torah refers to the ten spies who brought a negative report of the Land of Israel as an *eidah ra'ah*, an evil community (Num. 14:26). So we see that God is sanctified in a community of at least ten members.

The requirement for a prayer quorum, and the way it is derived, raises two issues that need to be addressed:

- Prayer appears to be a private matter between the soul and its Maker. Why should we need a minyan of ten participants in order to pray the complete service?

- Why is the requirement for a minyan derived precisely from two classic examples of rebellion and infamy — the spies and Korach?

Perfecting the Community

Holiness is rooted in our natural aspirations for spiritual growth and perfection. However, the desire to perfect ourselves — even spiritually — is not true holiness. Our goal should not be the fulfillment of our own personal needs, but rather to honor and sanctify our Maker. Genuine holiness is an altruistic striving for good for its own sake, not out of self-interest.

The heart of an elevated service of God is when we fulfill His will by helping and uplifting society. Therefore, the Kedushah prayer may not be recited in private. Without a community to benefit and elevate, the individual cannot truly attain higher levels of holiness.

This special connection between the individual and the community is reflected in the number ten. Ten is the first number that is also a group, a

collection of units forming a new unit. Therefore, the minimum number of members for a prayer quorum is ten.

Learning from Villains

But why do we learn this lesson from the wicked?

It is precisely the judgment of the wicked that sheds light on the reward of the righteous.

If the only result of wrongdoing was that the wicked corrupt themselves, it would be unnecessary for the law to be so severe with one who is only hurting himself. However, it is part of human nature that we influence others and are influenced by our surroundings. The wicked have a negative influence on the entire community, and it is for this reason that they are punished so severely.

This also illuminates the opposite: the power of the righteous. Just as the wicked are judged not only for their own actions but for the harm they bring to the community, so, too, the righteous are rewarded primarily for the good they bring into the lives of others.

Now it becomes clear that true holiness is in the context of the organic whole. Thus the Kedushah prayer, sanctifying God's Name, requires a minyan, a representative community of ten souls.

The Triumph of Israel and the Spirit of the Jewish People

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Israelis, Jews, and decent people around the world breathed a great sigh of relief and were filled with euphoria at the news that the spectacular American military, at the courageous order of President Donald Trump, had bombed and obliterated Iran's nuclear program. As of now, the 12-day war with Iran has reached a ceasefire with a stunning Israeli military victory, one that experts already say surpasses the Six Day war. We would all be remiss if we didn't follow the example of President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu, who both publicly and proudly thanked God for the success of their efforts.

It is truly extraordinary that for nearly fifty years, an evil regime, the world's largest state sponsor of terror, has wreaked havoc, murdering innocent Americans and Israelis while threatening its Arab neighbors. The danger and threat to the world of a nuclear Iran has been articulated by the last five American presidents and by countless world leaders.

History will show that President Trump and the United States didn't just talk about eliminating that threat, they acted. But the US, the world's greatest superpower, didn't do it alone, they had the help of only one other country. If you looked only at a comparison of countries by populations, land mass, economy, how long they have existed, their role among nations, would you ever guess that the other country that not only assisted but paved the way and set the stage was smaller than New Jersey, is only 77 years old and has a total population of just 10 million? I got goosebumps when President Trump thanked Israel: "I want to thank and congratulate Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu. We worked as a team like perhaps no team has ever worked before, and we've gone a long way to erasing this horrible threat to Israel. I want to thank the Israeli military for the wonderful job they've done."

The role and contribution of the State of Israel in protecting the world and keeping it safe is nothing short of a Kiddush Hashem, a fulfillment of the Jewish people's mission in the world.

I was sitting at a beautiful Chuppah on Sunday, thinking about and reflecting on this achievement. The seventh beracha was recited and the Chuppah was about to conclude but instead of turning to the singing of Im Eshkacheich, we were all invited to rise as something else was sung first, the Mi'Shebeirach for Tzahal, the prayer for the IDF. I have attended dozens of weddings since October 7, and at every one of them, a prayer for our brothers and sisters in Israel and for the heroic and courageous members of the IDF was included, sometimes as the IDF prayer and other times as Tehillim.

As we all stood and focused on the heartfelt Tefillah, a thought occurred to me. In America's wars, in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, was any wedding of the average American interrupted to include a prayer for the American military? Were the weddings of any Americans paused to pray for American troops? Unless an immediate family member of the bride or groom was serving in active duty, I can't imagine a prayer was

included, even right here in America. And yet, for the last year and three quarters, around the world, thousands of miles from Israel, Jews everywhere have refused to celebrate without also pausing to pray for the IDF. The Jewish people are unique in this way. Wherever we are around the world, we feel connected, and our wellbeing is intertwined.

In several places (Yevamos 61a, Bava Metzia 114b, Kerisus 6b), the Gemara says, "You, the Jewish people are called אדם, Odom, but the nations of the world are not called Odom." Read simply, it sounds like a terribly prejudiced and biased statement.

Rav Frand shares a story that offers a deeper understanding: In 1912, in Russia, Mendel Beilus was accused of killing a Christian child and using his blood to bake Matzahs. This slander or variations of it were unfortunately prevalent in Europe for many, many years. They were known as blood libels. Beilus' lawyer was afraid that to buttress their case, the accusers would make the argument that Jews considered non-Jews less than human. He was in fact afraid that they would cite the above-quoted Talmudic reference to prove this very point.

The lawyer therefore visited the Chortkever Rebbe and asked him how he could respond if the opposing lawyers would throw that Gemara at him. The Rebbe said as follows: If an Italian was seized and put on trial, we would not witness a scenario where all Italians were congregating in their churches to pray for this one Italian. The same can be said about the French for a Frenchman, and so too about all other nations. However, when a Jew is seized and put on trial, the solidarity that Jews have toward each other will make every Jew throughout the world stop and pray for the welfare of that other Jew.

This is how the Chortkever Rebbe explained Chazal's statement that "You are called Odom." The Hebrew language is extremely precise in terms of the different connotations of apparent synonyms. Other words for "man" has a singular and a plural – ish, anashim, gever, gevarim. However, the word Odom is the same whether referring to one or many. The singular term "Odom" fits the Jews. All Jews are considered as a single entity. There is no dichotomy. We are all in this together. The reason why the word "Odom" is employed referring to Jews is because this is the only term for humanity that has no plural and the Jewish people are a singular people.

This is not a racist or bigoted interpretation. It is a unique attribute of the Jewish people that has been demonstrated time and time again in ancient times and we are experiencing it right now. If one Jew is held hostage, Jews around the world feel the pain and storm the heavens. When heroic soldiers of the IDF are fighting, Jewish weddings around the world are interrupted with a prayer on their behalf.

With Israel's victory against Iran, we hope and pray that Hamas surrenders, releases the hostages, and Jewish people around the world can live with the peace and tranquility we deserve. But until they do, we will always feel a sense of responsibility for and oneness with one another.

Parshas Korach

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen by the Glowinsky family.

Your Wish is My Command

This week's parsha recounts the events surrounding the uprising instigated by Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu regarding Moshe's appointment of Aharon as Kohen Gadol. Essentially, Korach argued that Moshe was not commanded by Hashem to appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol; Moshe had done so of his own discretion. Korach seems to be insinuating that Moshe had fabricated the Divine command for Aharon's appointment.

This is shocking; if Korach could imply that Moshe had not actually received a command from Hashem that he claimed to have been given, then the veracity of the entire Torah, by extension, could be called into question. In other words, who's to say what Hashem commanded and what Moshe made up on his own? If the people could believe that Moshe had fabricated one Divine commandment for his own benefit,

then they could also believe that he had fabricated the entire Torah as well.

Korach was a remarkable talmid chacham and hailed from one of the most prestigious and influential families. How is it possible that one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish nation could question such a fundamental underpinning of the faith, especially when doing so would essentially subvert the entire experience of Har Sinai and call into question the authenticity of Judaism itself?

After the Torah was given at Har Sinai, Hashem told Moshe that the entire Jewish people should "return to their tents," but He added a different command to Moshe himself: "And you, stay here with Me." The Gemara (Shabbos 87a) explains that the rest of the nation had been enjoined to abstain from marital relations while the Torah was given, but they were now freed to resume their normal family lives. Moshe, on the other hand, was told to separate permanently from his wife. The Gemara relates that this idea actually originated with Moshe himself: Since he was at a high level of prophecy, he wanted to make himself constantly available to receive prophetic messages.

Tosafos (ad loc) explains that the Gemara infers this from the fact that Aharon and Miriam later questioned the propriety of Moshe's decision. Since they suggested that it was improper, it is clear that the idea must have come from Moshe, for they would never have made such a statement about an idea that originated with Hashem.

This points to an astounding concept: It is possible that Hashem may make a statement to a person not because it is His wish, but rather because the person desires it. In this case, Moshe felt that it was correct to separate from his wife. Aharon and Miriam disagreed with his decision, even though Hashem Himself had confirmed it, as it were, by directing Moshe to do so. Clearly, they felt that Hashem's command could be interpreted as a mere "rubber stamp" for Moshe's decision; it did not indicate Hashem's approval of it at all.

Parents often face similar dilemmas with their children. Many times parents disagree with their children's decisions; they may feel that their children are choosing a career that is not suitable for them, passing up an opportunity that they should not forego, or otherwise making imprudent choices. In these situations, the natural inclination of a parent is to attempt to control his child's decisions or pressure the child to make the choice that he deems correct. This, however, is a major mistake. Of course, it should go without saying, that if a child makes a decision that harms himself or someone else, his parents should intervene to stop him. However, in most situations parents must support decisions made by their children. This is exactly what Korach claimed to have happened. According to Korach, Moshe wanted to appoint his brother and Hashem merely supported it, just as He did when Moshe decided that it was proper to separate from his wife. This should not be mistaken as a commandment from Hashem. Korach wasn't calling into question the veracity of the Torah, merely the appointment of Moshe's brother as Kohen Gadol.

The King's Prerogative

The entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You put to death the nation of Hashem!' (Bamidbar 17:6).

On the day after the earth miraculously swallowed up Korach and his followers, a most astounding confrontation took place: The rest of Bnei Yisroel accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths of their fellow Jews. This is difficult to understand in light of the fact that the deaths of the rebels were clearly the result of a Divinely ordained miracle. Moshe and Aharon had not been the ones to kill them; it was Hashem Himself who had done so in a miraculous fashion! How could Bnei Yisroel level such an accusation?

Before the final confrontation in which the rebellious people were killed, Moshe announced, "With this you will know that Hashem has sent me to do all these deeds, for it was not from my heart. If these people die like all men, and the fate of all men befalls them, then Hashem has not sent me. But if Hashem creates a new creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that they have, and they descend to the grave alive, then you will know that these people angered Hashem" (Bamidbar

16:28-30). Thus, Moshe announced that only a miracle would substantiate his claim to be a legitimate agent of Hashem. If that miracle did not occur, the validity of the entire Torah would be called into question.

Shockingly, Moshe was thus risking the entire Jewish nation's belief in the Torah on the basis that Hashem would perform a miracle for him. This is problematic; the Chechenover Rebbe points out, the conspirators could have spared themselves by doing teshuvah. How could Moshe take the risk that they might repent and avert the miracle he had promised, thereby jeopardizing the entire nation's faith?

The answer is that in this case teshuvah would not have worked to save them from death. Moshe was not predicting that Hashem would perform a miracle in order to demonstrate who was correct. Rather, he was invoking his authority as the king of Bnei Yisroel to have those who rebelled against his authority put to death. The Torah gives a king that right, and Moshe exercised that right by asking Hashem to carry out the sentence through a miracle. The sentence of death itself, though, was based on his royal prerogative.

In the Torah's judicial system, no sinner can save himself by repenting from a punishment imposed by man. In fact, we are required to urge every person who is about to be executed to engage in teshuvah, even though the execution will not be cancelled as a result. Clearly, the purpose of the teshuvah is to have a beneficial effect on his soul in the World to Come, even though the Beis Din is still required to carry out the sentence of death. Likewise, Korach and his cohorts were unable to save themselves by repenting, because their deaths were the result of Moshe's decree, not a Divinely imposed punishment. Moshe simply asked Hashem to carry out that decree for him.

This explains the basis of the people's complaint; while a king has the right to have a rebel against his authority put to death, he is not required to do so. Thus, they accused Moshe of unnecessarily causing the rebels' deaths, since he could have disregarded their crimes and refrained from calling for them to be killed. Even though the death sentence was ultimately carried out by Hashem Himself, it was Moshe's prerogative to waive it.

<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/410651>

Korach: Trump bombed our enemies, FDR refused to bomb railroad tracks to Auschwitz

Iran will remain a world threat because the U.S. and Israel did not finish the job in the fashion dictated in the Torah. But we must recognize that Trump made up for FDR's refusal to bomb the tracks leading to Auschwitz.

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Tanach (Kings 1, chapter 18) records that Eliyahu HaNavi confronted the evil Achav (Ahab), king of the 10 northern tribes, with a challenge. To gather on Mount Carmel with many of his subjects along with 450 prophets of the idol Baal for a test.

Two altars would be constructed, each with a slaughtered bull prepared for sacrifice, but with no fire lit. The prophets of Baal would call on their god to send fire, and Eliyahu would call on Hashem; and the deity who answered would be proven as the authentic one.

The prophets of Baal went first. From morning until noon, they cried out to Baal, danced around their altar, gashing themselves ritually, hoping to provoke a response. Eliyahu taunted them, suggesting that perhaps the Baal is occupied with personal matters, perhaps he is sleeping or even traveling. Despite their fervent efforts, there was no fire and no response.

Towards late afternoon, after their dismal failure, came Eliyahu's turn.

He repaired a long broken-down altar to Hashem, using twelve stones representing the tribes of Israel. And in order to make the awesome miracle even more undeniable, he requested that the slaughtered bulls, the altar and its wood, be drenched with twelve large jugs of water, enough to fill a large trench around the altar.

Then Eliyahu uttered a prayer, asking Hashem to show that He is the omnipotent God of creation and of the Jews. Fire immediately appeared out of nowhere and consumed not only the sacrifice and the wood, but also the stones of the altar and even the water in the trench.

Witnessing this undeniable display of divine power, the Jews bowed as one and exclaimed, "Hashem - He is the only God! Hashem - He is the only God!" Eliyahu then commanded seizure of all the prophets of Baal to be brought to the Kishon Valley and killed.

My question regarding this dramatic incident is: after realizing the feebleness, collapse and impotence of their deity, why didn't the prophets deny the deity of Baal and submit to the Jewish God? Why had he forsaken his faithful children? E-lokim, the God of Yisrael is true, and Allah is a fiction?

This same question arose now when the Ayatollahs of Iran and other Islamic religious leaders witnessed the incredible miracles that were performed for the Jews in the miniscule State of Israel (land area of Iran is 80 times larger than Israel and their population is 9 times greater). Why didn't they rise up and yell, "where is Allah?"

Answer: Belief in a higher being goes beyond an individual's logic and experience. The prophets of Baal went to their deaths believing that Eliyahu was a master magician, but their Baal was still Baal.

So too with the warped minds of Islamics. We can beat them to a pulp, but their sense of honor will lead them to Gehennom before they admit that E-lokim is the true G-d.

It appears that the only solution when dealing with people like this is the one proscribed in the Torah regarding the ten nations whom we found in the land when entering with Yehoshua bin Nun.

Is there an Eliyahu or a Yehoshua bin Nun anywhere among us today? If so let him step forward and lead.

The 3,000-year-old battle continues

In the minds of most observers, the Arab - Israeli "conflict" is a manifestation of an unresolved political conflict over land, resources, security, and national identity, marked by periods of conventional warfare and ongoing asymmetric violence.

The impression I receive from President Trump's statements and actions regarding the Arab-Israeli battles is like a parent hovering over his young children as they fight over an irrelevant crayon, and he imposes his parental authority. When and where you can shoot, when there will be a cease fire, and for how long, etc.

But this is far from the truth. The Arab Israeli "free-for-all" is not a mere conflict. It is a three-thousand-year-old struggle to the death between the two sons of Avraham - Yitzchak and Yishmael and their descendants; where Yitzchak is faithful to E-lokim and Yishmael chooses idol worship, Avoda Zara, that has turned into devotion to Allah.

In this three millennium-year-old battle, no holds are barred, and no side will cede.

Evil minds and hearts like the Jihadi Moslems never forget and never forgive. They are like snakes waiting for their prey. By not destroying the regime, and permitting them to reconstruct their atomic facilities, their first ten nuclear bombs to be constructed will be directed at the US, the second batch at Christian Europe, the third will explode over Tehran.

Iran will remain a world threat because the U.S. and Israel did not finish the job in the fashion dictated in the Torah.

Next Battleground: The Strait of Hormuz

The Zohar (end of parashat Va'eira, second parasha in the book of Shemot) reveals that the "Sons of Yishmael" will, in the future, provoke three great wars against the descendants of Edom (Esau); one on the sea, another on land, and the third in the vicinity of Yerushalayim where Yishmael will then be totally destroyed.

I suggest: At the exact moment of our planet's creation, Hashem had already navigated Man's destiny through the design and placing of continents, with their specific raw materials essential for the development of societies.

Hashem placed huge underground oceans of petroleum for the benefit of the descendants of Yishmael, leaving a relatively modest quantity of natural gas in the Mediterranean for the descendants of Yitzchak.

Around 20-30% of global oil trade and approximately one-fifth of global natural gas transit the Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, leading out to the Gulf of Oman and from there to the Arabian ocean, and Indian and Pacific oceans.

As matters are now developing and the present threats of the Iranian Nazi regime, it appears that the battleground of Yishmael's naval battle against the Christian west will be at the Strait of Hormuz. This strait is of immense importance due to its critical role in global energy and international trade. It is the world's most important oil transit choke point. A significant portion of the world's seaborne oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes through this narrow waterway.

The Strait provides the only sea passage from the oil-rich Persian Gulf to the open ocean (Arabian Sea and beyond). Countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Qatar, Iran, and Kuwait rely heavily on this strait for their crude oil and natural gas exports.

Any disruption or threat to the flow of oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz can immediately cause significant price spikes in global energy markets. This will have a cascading effect, leading to higher fuel costs, impacting economies worldwide.

At its narrowest point, the Strait is only about 33 kilometers (21 miles) wide, with shipping lanes just 3 kilometers wide in each direction. This makes it highly

vulnerable to blockades, military actions, or even terrorist attacks, which could severely impact global supply chains.

The Iranians have threatened to block the strait with sea mines even though they themselves will be the big losers. It would be by international law "casus belli" (Latin term meaning "a cause of war" or "an act or event that provokes or is used to justify war").

President Trump made the correct choice

President Trump deliberated with his advisors whether to get involved in the Iranian situation by bombing their major nuclear facilities. We are not privy to the issues involved nor his inner thoughts, or perhaps the impulses imposed on him by Hashem through his conscience, but there is an interesting issue.

Every day 12,000 Jews were murdered in the Auschwitz Birkenau camps alone. They were brought from all over Europe by train and to many other death camps that dotted the landscape of Europe. Jewish leaders begged FDR to bomb the track leading to these camps. Every day that the trains would not run thousands of Jewish lives would be saved.

How many times did the US Air Force, which flew in the vicinity of many of these camps, bomb them?

NOT EVEN ONCE!

I recall an interview with a Jewish pilot whose plane had to land but could not because of the bombs he was carrying. He was commanded to jettison the bombs but warned not to drop them over the rail tracks leading to the camps!

This is an indelible stain on the moral history of America.

President Trump was in a similar situation last week, with an opportunity to blur that stain somewhat.

MAGA! President Trump chose the right direction of history by bombing the elements designed to murder millions of Jews as was planned in ancient Persia and intended to be put into practice by their present-day descendants.

In closing: What is unfolding now is just the beginning of an ongoing world change.

A world where the Jewish nation, led by Hashem, ascends the historical stairway to world leadership.

GREAT TO BE A JEW!

Shabbat Shalom!_____

By Miracle or by Natural Means

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Revivim

Whether it is proper to bless on the military success in Iran • Whether it is correct to define what happened there as a miracle • The precision of the Ran on the verse "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you might to be successful" • How to maintain humility, while on the other hand, not denying the power that God gave us • And what was special about King David, that specifically he merited the greatest victories – and without miracles
Shehecheyanu

Q: Was it proper to bless "Shehecheyanu" or "HaTov VeHametiv" after Israel's security forces succeeded in striking the top of Iran's military command, and also after the United States joined Israel and bombed Iran's nuclear facilities? And which blessing should have been recited?

A: Anyone who felt joy from this, there was room to bless "Shehecheyanu" for having merited to strike our enemies and their weapons of war in the eyes of the entire world. However, there is no halachic obligation in this, since there are two types of "Shehecheyanu" blessing, one chova (obligatory) and the second, mitzvot reshut (a voluntary commandment). The halachic obligation – on holidays, and their commandments; the voluntary commandment – on joyful things that are renewed for a person and make him happy, where the one who blesses fulfills a commandment, but one who does not bless, does not transgress a sin. Since this blessing depends on joy of the heart, and there is no fixed measure and standard for joy, consequently, it is impossible to establish it as an obligation (see, Peninei Halakha: Berachot 17: 2, 1).

And it is correct to bless "Shehecheyanu" and not "HaTov VeHametiv," since the blessing "HaTov VeHametiv" was instituted for a tangible joy that is shared by at least two people, like spouses who buy a new house and new appliances, or on drinking an additional type of wine consumed in company of others. Whereas the blessing "Shehecheyanu" is a more general thanksgiving, that was also instituted for good news that has no tangible benefit, like one who hears that his son received an important prize, or earned a very large profit (Peninei Halakha, ibid 17:8). And this

good news of bombing the nuclear facilities is not tangible like financial profit, or buying a house or appliances, that one blesses “HaTov VeHametiv” on, but it is good news about removing existential danger and raising Israel’s honor, and therefore, its blessing is “Shehecheyanu.” In addition to this, one should not be so concerned about saying a bracha levatala (a blessing said in vain) regarding “Shehecheyanu,” since according to the Rivash (section 505), since this blessing is reshut (voluntary), the rule safek brachot le’hakel (“in doubt regarding blessings, be lenient”), does not apply to it, and in a place of doubt, one who is happy is permitted to bless. And even though most authorities did not agree with his opinion, not a few authorities agreed, among them the Bach, Pri Chadash, Eliyahu Rabbah, Tzelach and Chatam Sofer. Therefore, whenever it appears that one should bless “Shehecheyanu,” one should bless without worrying about saying a blessing in vain. However, those who want to also bless “HaTov VeHametiv” can drink wine in company of others and bless “HaGefen,” and afterwards, drink an additional type of wine that from one aspect is better, and bless on it “HaTov VeHametiv,” and rejoice by way of it, over the salvation that was granted us.

Whether the Successes in the War with Iran are Miracle or Nature

Q: “A debate arose among a group of friends. Some claimed that the success of the attacks on Iran is a wondrous and wonderful miracle, since naturally, such great success would be impossible. On the other hand, some claimed that the success was caused through natural means, owing to wise, diligent, and idealistic people, who planned and executed it. Who is right?”

A: It must be prefaced that the difference between nature and miracle is only from man’s perspective, that the orders of nature appear to him as self-evident and maintained by their own forces, while miracles are not understood by him, and therefore, they impress him more. But from the Creator’s perspective, there is no difference between nature and miracle, since God gives life to everything, to nature and to miracle alike. Therefore, what is called a miracle can also be called nature, and on the other hand, nature can also be considered a miracle, because it exists only through God, as we say in prayer: “Your miracles that are with us every day” (Ramban, Exodus 13: 16).

In other words, the discussion whether it is a miracle or nature is only from man’s perspective, and from man’s perspective, these are great successes that were achieved with God’s help by means of nature. It is not about miracles, because they did not deviate from the laws of nature, but like all things in the world, they exist by God’s kindnesses, all the more so when it comes to special successes, where God’s help is more evident in them.

What is the Damage in Defining Them as Miracles

Q: Even if every success can be explained by means of nature, is it not correct that the overall success is a wonderful miracle that must be recognized?! And what is the damage in defining what happened as a miracle, is this not an expression of greater faith?

A: First, the error in the incorrect definition is the damage. God’s seal is truth (Shabbat 55a), and any deviation from truth leads us away from walking in God’s ways.

Second, defining something that was done with wisdom, diligence and courage as a miracle might cause people to rely on miracles, while neglecting the Torah commandments to serve in the army, and become negligent in the commandments of Yishuv Ha’Aretz (Settling the Land), which includes developing the state scientifically, and economically.

One must be precise and say that we reached all these successes with God’s help. In other words, the military achievements were achieved by idealistic, talented and brave people, who for years, with diligence and resourcefulness, gathered intelligence and formulated successful plans. And thanks to heroic soldiers who trained for the missions, risked their lives, and went out to the enemy’s country by air and land, and struck it a hard blow. However, without God’s help, even the most diligent and talented would not succeed in their deeds, all the more so, when it comes to such extraordinary successes. As it is said: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it; unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman keeps vigil in vain” (Psalms 127:1). That is, one

must be diligent in building the house and posting guards, but without God’s help, they will not succeed – just as the Iranians did not succeed despite all their efforts, because God does not want the success of the wicked.

In summary, when defining the successes properly, they arouse us to thank God for His help, and to continue being diligent in developing the State of Israel in science, economy and security.

Is There No Concern of “My Strength, and the Might of My Hand”

Q: Is there no concern that when defining successes by means of nature, one arrives at pride, and sins by saying ‘kochki ve’otzem yadi’ (“my strength, and the might of my hand made me successful”)?

A: The use of the expression “my strength, and the might of my hand” is mistaken, and often even accompanied by the sin of disparaging the commandments of military service, which is a commandment that is equivalent to all the commandments, through which we settle the Land, and through which, we save Clal Yisrael (all of Israel).

I will elaborate a bit in explaining the context. The Torah commanded us to keep all the commandments, including the commandment of Settling the Land, as it is said: “All the commandment which I command you today you shall observe to do, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the Land which the Lord swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 8:1). After that, the Torah warned us not to forget all the kindnesses and miracles that God did for us in the wilderness, lest as a result of the blessing and success that greatly empowers man, we become proud, and forget God and the mission placed upon us. As it is said: “And you say in your heart, my strength and the might of my hand made me this success” (Deuteronomy 8:17), and as a result, we will perish from the good Land.

So that this would not happen, the Torah taught: “And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you might to be successful, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:18). The Ran [Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven (1290 – 1376)], was precise and explained, that if the Torah wanted to diminish the value of Israel’s handiwork, it would have said: “for He gives you success,” but it said “for He gives you might to be successful,” to teach us that Israel, through their might, are successful, except that they must remember that God gave them this power (Ran, beginning of Derush 10).

We see then, that when Israel takes pride in their might and the strength of their hand, without remembering that God gave them the power, they sin in pride, and their punishment is to perish from the good Land. And likewise, when they deny the power that God gave them, they continue to sin in the ‘Sin of the Spies’, denying God’s guidance, and being negligent in His commandments, and for this too, they are punished, and perish from the good Land.

Should a Day of Joy and Song be Established Like the Song of the Sea?

Question from another person: “Is it not proper to establish for the great miracles that happened to us a holiday, and to recite a song like the ‘Song of the Sea’, for after all, the miracle that was performed for us is great, just like the splitting of the Red Sea, and the salvation of Hezekiah, who was punished for not singing a song?”

A: One must be careful of exaggerations. Hezekiah was saved from the army that threatened to destroy him, without any effort on his part. The splitting of the Red Sea was the greatest miracle that completed the Exodus from Egypt, and by means of this, God was revealed to the world through His people. But following this, there were no such great miracles. On the contrary, the main guidance of the people of Israel, residing in the Land of Israel, should be by natural means, and by way of this, complete faith is revealed, namely, that all humanity, with the nation of Israel at their center, continue God’s word and His blessing to the world (see Peninei Halakha: Faith and Its Commandments 18: 3-5). Not only that, but such is the world’s pattern, that after revealed miracles crises occur, and the greater the miracle, the greater the crisis. Because following great miracles, people have difficulty continuing to conduct their lives with greatness, and they fall. Thus, it happened to those who left Egypt, that after all the great miracles, they sinned in the ‘Sin of the

Golden Calf' and the 'Sin of the Spies', and were punished to die in the wilderness.

In the Way of King David

In our generation, we must conduct ourselves in the way of King David, who never relied on miracles, only asked God to help him prepare his soldiers, and give him courage and resourcefulness to defeat his enemies. Thanks to this, he was the king who merited the greatest victories without miracles, and was the king who prayed to God most, and thanked and praised Him more than all other kings. Our Sages said about him: "All of David's life, he never saw a good dream" (Berakhot 55b), rather, all of his dreams were bad, about wars, destruction and desolation (Zohar Part I 200:1). However, because he had great faith, his bad dreams did not discourage him, but rather, caused him to recognize all the dangers lurking around him, and thus, he was diligent in preparing his army and was always alert, and thanks to this, he saved Israel.

We must learn from King David to always prepare for war, and to pray to God that He be our help, and to thank and sing before Him with musical instruments for every salvation, without a trace of arrogance.

However, on days when we merited to advance tangibly in fulfilling the commandment of Settling the Land, which is the essence of the Redemption, there is an obligation to establish holidays. Therefore, we celebrate on Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day), and on Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

[CS Addition:

Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Korach 5785

Alan Fisher

BS"D

We all hope that Operation Rising Lion successfully destroyed enough of Iran's nuclear program to set back its nuclear weapon program for decades. Hopefully the cease fire will last a long time. It is encouraging that no other country participated with Iran in fighting against Israel or the U.S. After the extremely impressive force from these countries, hopefully more countries will join the Abraham Accords and bring some peace to the Middle East.

I recommend highly going to parsha.net Friday morning to download the Internet Parsha Sheet. It is an outstanding compilation that normally posts shortly after midnight Thursday night.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

BS"D

June 27, 2025.

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #36, June 27-28, 2025; 2 Tammuz 5785; Korach 5785

Rosh Hodesh Tammuz is Thursday and Friday, 30 Sivan - 1 Tammuz

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. May we verify that the 12 Day War did knock out Iran's nuclear capability, and may Hashem continue to protect Israel and all our people from our enemies and their weapons.

Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l, whose fifth yearzeit is 4 Tammuz. Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohan-Sedgh, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her.

Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, uses evidence from the Torah to prove that the final events involving the generation of the Exodus all take place during a single week. Miriam's tzaraat (chapter 12), the departure of the Meraglim (chapter 13), and Korach's rebellion (chapter 16) all take place between 22 and 29 Sivan in the second year after the Exodus. (See Torah Anthology 13.333-34.) Since this Shabbat is 2 Tammuz, last week was the anniversary of these distressing events.

Korach's rebellion is the final episode in the Torah discussing the generation of the Exodus. The Torah opens next week with chapter 19, the law of becoming tahor after contact with a dead body (originally presented to Moshe while B'Nai Yisrael are still next to Har Sinai but only recorded in the Torah here, after the final discussion of the generation doomed to die off without entering the land). After a gap of 38 years, the Torah continues in chapter 20 with events of the final year in the Midbar.

The Torah presents the relationship between Moshe and Korach (Shemot 6:16-26). Levi's second son, Amram, has three sons: Gershon, Kohat, and Merari. Kohat, the second son, has four sons; Amram is the oldest, and Izhar is second oldest. Amram has two sons, Aharon and Moshe. Korach is the oldest son of Izhar, the second oldest son of Kohat. Since Aharon's and Korach's fathers are brothers, Moshe and Korach are first cousins. Moshe is the second son of the oldest brother, and Korach is the oldest son of Amram's next oldest brother. Since Moshe is the second oldest son of Levi's second oldest son, there is family history among the Levi's descendants of second oldest sons having religious priority over first born sons (as there had been in numerous generations in Sefer Bereishis). In terms of precedent of which relative will become the religious leader of a given generation, Korach could expect his claim to equal that of Moshe, all else equal.

Originally, the concept in the Torah was for a first born son to be the religious leader of a given generation. After the sin of the Golden Cow (Egel Zahav), where all tribes except Levi participate, God removes the religious leadership of each family from the first born son to descendants of Levi. This change takes place in Behaalotecha. God gives the religious leadership to direct descendants of Aharon (the Kohanim), and descendants of Levi have the other religious obligations, including carrying the Mishkan and holy objects used inside the Ark. Korach objects to Aharon and his sons, not he, being the Kohanim.

The presentation of the disputes in the parsha can be difficult to follow, because Korach brings members of Reuven (Yaakov's first born son) and numerous other first born sons from other tribes, all of whom lose their religious leadership roles after Egel Zahav. This large group joins Korach and his sons to challenge Aharon and Moshe for both religious and political leadership. (At the last minute, Korach's sons decide to go with Moshe, rather than their father, and they do not die in the challenge.) Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's Devar Torah, included as an attachment to the email version, sorts out the various groups and makes the separate stories easy to follow.

The Torah opens the parsha by stating that Korach takes, without indicating what he takes. Rabbi Marc Angel considers explanations among early commentators, rejects them all, and concludes that Korach takes nothing, only himself. Korach is all bluster with no evidence, no arguments, nothing to explain why he, not Aharon, deserves to be Kohen Gadol. Rabbi Haim Ovadia contrasts the Korach in the Torah with Korach in Midrash. The Midrash presents articulate and convincing reasons why Korach's case for replacing Aharon as Kohen Gadol has merit. During the time of writing the Midrash, many kohanim's extreme presentations of halacha would conclude that poor homeowners owed substantial payoffs to the kohanim. A later reform required that any payment that a person had to turn over to the kohanim would go to some other Kohen, not the Kohen making the ruling.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that Korach would attack the person, not the message. Korach thus attacks Moshe personally but offers no evidence why Korach, rather than Moshe or Aharon, should be the leaders of B'Nai Yisrael. As Rabbi Sacks observes, we see this evil today, especially in universities and in the cancel culture of political extremists. Writing in 2020, Rabbi Sacks condemned the practice of not letting opponents speak – at universities, demonstrations, and in political contexts. Rabbi Sacks' insights predicted the woke and anti-Semitic demonstrations and violence that reached across universities, high schools, and into synagogues – in many countries – in recent years. One reaction to this extremist behavior could have been the unexpectedly strong showing of the Republican party in the 2024 U.S. elections. Hopefully the successful campaign against Iran's nuclear weapons – with virtually no support for Iran even from enemies of Israel and the United States – is one indication that the followers of Moshe are replacing many of the followers of Korach at long last.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

[CS Added:

https://torahweb.org/torah/special/2025/ryud_israelwar.html

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Pay Back

I believe that everyone remembers their excitement and relief upon hearing the news immediately after havdalah on motzaei Shabbos Parshas Shlach, when we learned of the United States' involvement in the Israel-Iran conflict. The immediate response was "Baruch Hashem" - thank You, Hashem, for Your intervention. Right after that, I recalled the Gemara (Brachos 35b) which says that it is an added blessing "when your work is done for you by others." Those with a more attuned halachic mind even recited the beracha upon hearing good news - Hatov v'Hametiv, that He is good and bestows goodness on others. The only debate was whether the blessing should be said with Hashem's name or not. But all agreed - it was a moment of thanksgiving. Thank You, Hashem.

This concept is taught in Gittin (38a), where Rav Pappa says, "Ammon and Moav were purified by Sichon." Hashem forbade (Devarim 2:9-19) the Jewish people

from attacking or conquering the land of Ammon and Moav, since they were our cousins, descended from Lot, Avraham's nephew. Yet shortly thereafter, when Bnei Yisrael asked to pass through the land of Sichon and Og, not only were they denied, but they were attacked, and Bnei Yisrael defeated them. Since Sichon and Og had previously conquered the territory of Ammon and Moav, our defeat of them enabled us to live on that land. Thus, Rav Pappa teaches that our work was done for us by others.

We see this idea in our liturgy. Every amidah begins with the blessing of Avos, in which we praise Hashem as Gomel chasadim tovim - He who bestows good kindnesses. Isn't every kindness good? The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l explained that Hashem not only helps us get the job done, but His kindness is tov - good - in that He allows us to feel as though we accomplished it, even though it is really done through His help. It is truly our work being done by Others.

Similarly, in Tehillim (62:13), the verse says: "And Yours, O Lord, is kindness, for You repay each man according to his deeds." The Alter of Kelm zt"l interpreted this to mean that Hashem rewards us based on our deeds, even though any good we achieve is only possible through His assistance.

There is no question that we are living in special times. Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed this sentiment when he thanked the United States for their assistance and concluded by acknowledging that it could not have happened without Siyata D'Shmaya - Divine assistance. Sometimes we don't recognize Hashem's involvement in world events until later; other times, like now, it is immediately clear.

How should we respond?

The Gemara (Shabbos 33b) tells us that after R' Shimon bar Yochai emerged from hiding in the cave, having been saved from the Romans, he said, "Since a miracle was performed for me, I will go and remedy something for the community." We owe Hashem a response. The Gemara discusses two or three different actions he took to benefit others after his salvation. We, too, have witnessed a miracle - perhaps not over twelve years, but over twelve days, truly a Divine wink. How should we respond?

Pirkei Avos (5:22) teaches, in the words of Ben Bag Bag, "Delve into the Torah and continue to delve into it, for everything is in it." And indeed, the Gemara in Shabbos tells us that when the Torah says (Bereishis 33:18), "And Yaakov arrived intact," it means that he was whole in body, in wealth, and in Torah. The verse continues, "and he encamped before the city," which the Rabbis understand to mean that he contributed to the welfare of the community of Shechem. This ties into another teaching in Shabbos (32a), that when someone experiences a miracle, they may lose some of their merit as payment. Yaakov shows us that we must give back - responding to miracles with acts of kindness and public service.

We see this again in Shemos (17:11), "When Moshe raised his hands, Israel was stronger; when he lowered them, Amalek was stronger." The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 29a) asks: Did Moshe's hands win the battle? No - the verse teaches that when the Jewish people looked upward and focused their hearts on their Father in Heaven, they prevailed. Unlike standard military strategies that require watching the enemy, here success came from looking upward - acknowledging that Hashem is, as the Shira says (Shemos 15:3), the true Master of war.

We are living in extraordinary times. Just as in the Six-Day War, we were again privileged to see miraculous military success - the destruction of the Iranian air force in half an hour, in the middle of the night. This stands in contrast to most of Jewish history, when we were pursued by our enemies. Now, we are taking the initiative.

Think about it: what do we want from Iran? Do we want their land? Do we wish to annex them? No. And yet, they seek to destroy us. Iran's animosity is irrational. As Bereishis Rabbah (55) states: "Both love and hatred break the bounds of protocol." I'm not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I believe that when we experience such clear Divine intervention, we must respond with equally elevated behavior.

How can additional gemilus chasadim and talmud Torah not only prevent any reduction in our merits but actually generate more Divine blessings? Chazal teach that mitzvos help in the moment, but Torah study sustains for the future.

The Gemara (Megillah 13a) tells us that Achashverosh's handing his ring to Haman did more to unify the Jewish people than all the rebuking of the Prophets. It spurred real change and repentance. May this difficult and inspiring time do the same - bring us together and strengthen our commitment to Torah and acts of kindness. Repairing a relationship, apologizing even when you're right, or learning one extra Mishnah a day - all of these are tangible responses.

As King David says (Tehillim 122:2), "Our feet stood firm within your gates, O Jerusalem," which the Gemara (Makkos 10a) interprets to mean that our military strength comes from Torah study in Jerusalem.

May we continue to daven and act for the safety of the hostages, our soldiers, and all of Klal Yisrael, and may we continue to hear besuros tovos, yeshuos, v'nechamos.]

Siyum in memory of YOCHANAN BEN YEKUTIEL YEHUDA (JOCHANAN KLEIN) is ready to enroll.

visit <https://www.lzechernishmas.com/signup.php?id=12573> in order to complete the learning by 19 Heshvan 5786, by sundown on 11/10/25.

לע"נ

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